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James Surowiecki

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THE MAIL

AT WAR'S PRECIPICE

Reading Robin Wright's article about a city on the precarious edge of the Syrian conflict was surreal for me ("The Vortex," December 8th). I live in Gaziantep and teach at Gaziantep University. I shop regularly at the Forum mall; I have heard that the Divan Hotel is where diplomats and other affluent guests stay while visiting Antep; Original Aleppo, the well-known Syrian restaurant that Wright mentions, makes some of the best falafel and hummus I've ever had. This city is not the safest in the world to live in, but it is a humbling and rewarding place to be. Every weekend, I meet newly arrived expats who are starting posts at organizations providing aid to Syria. Life continues on. The streets are still full of people going about their business, cars noisily speed by my apartment building at night, bus drivers honk through their daily routes. Still, everyone knows the city's security risks as the situation in Syria deteriorates. During one of the first classes I taught in Gaziantep, I asked students to share something about themselves by way of introduction. Aref, a student from Syria, replied, "Well, I am from Aleppo and I lived through the war for two years, so I guess that's interesting." My Syrian students, who are now living in Gaziantep, are the lucky ones.

*Margaretta Burdick
Gaziantep, Turkey*

Wright's piece on Gaziantep provided a clear-eyed and accurate description of Syria's geopolitical tangle. I work for a Syrian civil-society organization based in Gaziantep. I was disappointed that the article does not mention any of the dozens of such groups bravely working for peace in the region; many of them use the city as a relatively safe base. Despite the devastation and chaos of nearly four years of war, they are distributing humanitarian aid, nego-

tiating with armed groups to reduce harm to civilians, advocating for the release of political prisoners, building the leadership capacity of unarmed grassroots leaders, creating a stronger public role for women, and addressing the lack of education. These activists come from all walks of life, from every religion and ethnicity in Syria, and women are playing a prominent role. They are forging local relationships that can be leveraged toward larger gains for stability. If Syria, like many other countries that have experienced violent conflict, is to attain a peaceful future, civil-society groups must be an integral part of the process.

*Josie Shagwert
Gaziantep, Turkey*

As a young American teaching English in Gaziantep, I appreciated Wright's thorough portrait of this fascinating city and its relation to the war in Syria. But Wright could have written more about an additional complication in this conflict: the growing backlash in the city against Syrian refugees. Three hundred thousand of them live in Gaziantep. The city reportedly welcomed the refugees during the early days of the rebellion, but since my arrival here, a few months ago, I have heard many complaints from Turks about the rapidly rising rents and overcrowding wrought by the explosion of Arab-speaking newcomers. Late last summer, some locals staged anti-Syrian protests. With no end in sight for the war and a slowing Turkish economy, what will happen to the refugee population if their neighbors turn against them, too?

*Anderson Tuggle
Gaziantep, Turkey*

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ELEMENTS

SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND THE THINGS THAT MAKE UP OUR WORLD

"No one joins Facebook to be sad and lonely. But a new study from the University of Michigan psychologist Ethan Kross argues that that's exactly how it makes us feel." —"How Facebook Makes Us Unhappy," Maria Konnikova

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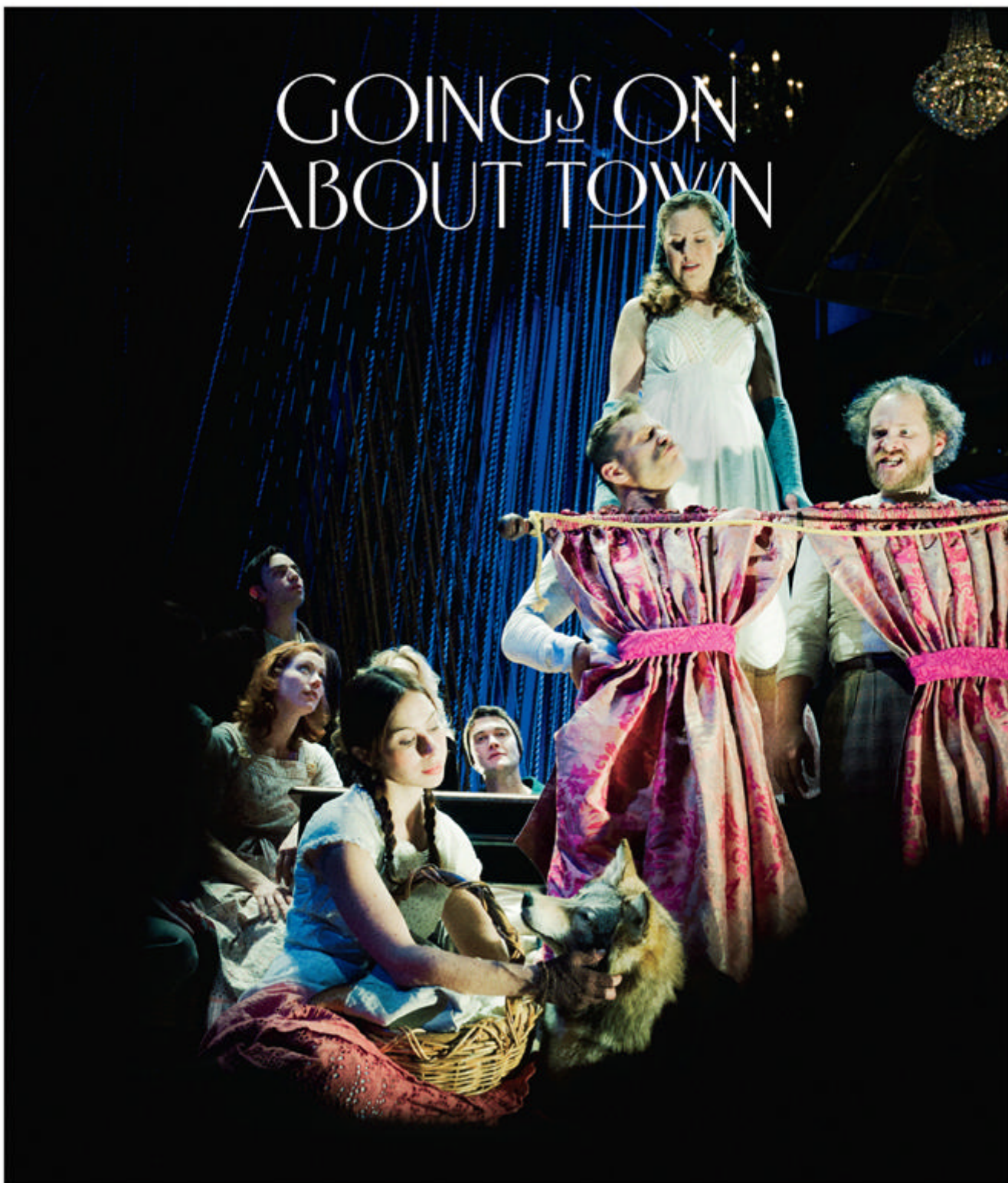


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GOING ON ABOUT TOWN



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FIASCO THEATRE REINVENTS classic plays with little more than the basics—excellent actors, a bedsheet and a box, maybe a French horn. For the troupe's production of Stephen Sondheim and James Lapine's 1987 musical, "Into the Woods" (at the Laura Pels, presented by the Roundabout Theatre Company), Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld direct eleven actors, accompanied by a piano, and a frame-mounted wolf's head. Sondheim, who takes pleasure in warping clichés, springs Cinderella, Little Red Riding Hood, Jack (of the Beanstalk), and Rapunzel from their childhood idylls and introduces them to an adult dystopia. Fiasco's spare reimagining, with its ingenuity and a little bit of pixie dust, offers a low-key alternative to the big-budget movie version—who needs Meryl Streep, Johnny Depp, and fifty million dollars?

ART | FOOD & DRINK
NIGHT LIFE | MOVIES
DANCE | THE THEATRE
CLASSICAL MUSIC
ABOVE & BEYOND

PHOTOGRAPH BY IOULEX

ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM

"Cubism: The Leonard A. Lauder Collection." Through Feb. 16.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World." Through April 5.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM

"Zero: Countdown to Tomorrow, 1950s–60s." Through Jan. 7.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM

"Chitra Ganesh: Eyes of Time." Through July 12.

AMERICAN MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY

"Nature's Fury: The Science of Natural Disasters." Through Aug. 9.

ASIA SOCIETY

"Nam June Paik: Becoming Robot." Through Jan. 4.

COOPER-HEWITT, SMITHSONIAN DESIGN MUSEUM

"Making Design." Through June 14.

FRICK COLLECTION

"Masterpieces from the Scottish National Gallery." Through Feb. 1.

MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

"Handmade: Artists' Holiday Cards from the Archives of American Art." Through Jan. 4.

MUSEO DEL BARRIO

"Marisol: Sculptures and Works on Paper." Through Jan. 10.

NEUE GALERIE

"Egon Schiele: Portraits." Through Jan. 19.

NEW MUSEUM

"Chris Ofili: Night and Day." Through Feb. 1.



CULTURE DESK

See a slide show of contemporary paintings in MOMA's current exhibition "The Forever Now."

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Metropolitan Museum

"Kimono: A Modern History"

This substantial exhibition of some fifty garments traces the evolution of the kimono, from an everyday wardrobe staple of the Edo period into a luxury good, an artistic medium, and a nationalistic symbol. Nineteenth-century silk robes with birds or butterflies would have been worn by noblewomen or merchants' wives, who paged through pattern books that functioned much as fashion magazines do today. After the Meiji Restoration, in 1868, Western influences began to appear in embroidered Japanese formal wear, while newly opened markets led to kimonos designed for export. Some pieces here reflect Japan's breakneck modernization—one is printed with images of cameras and film; another, made for a child, features Mickey Mouse—while others verge on propaganda, with scenes of victory in the Russo-Japanese war and bomber planes resplendent on black silk. The show closes with contemporary clothing by Issey Miyake and Yohji Yamamoto, whose respective pleats and punctures update a centuries-old tradition. Through Jan. 19.

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Walter de Maria

The American artist, who died last year, ranged freely across a number of movements that arose in the sixties, from minimalism and Conceptualism to Land Art. Here, from 1984, are five gleaming stainless-steel polyhedrons, each with an increasing number of facets: the bases are pentagons in the first instance and tridecagons in the last. The forms soften over the sequence from prismatic to nearly cylindrical. Also on view is a large example from de Maria's "Equal Area" series; a circle and a square of equal surface dimensions, both made of steel, rest on the floor. An ambient soundtrack (a drumroll, ocean waves) pulls de Maria's work back from the brink of pure ideation into the realm of the senses. Through Jan. 7. (Gagosian, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-744-2313.)

Juan Muñoz

The Spanish artist's bronze, iron, and terra-cotta works suggest baroque sculptures with the heat turned off. Muñoz, who died in 2001, when he was only forty-eight, crafted human figures, slightly off scale and without

individualized features, in confusing, sometimes disturbing configurations. In the centerpiece here, thirteen men sit on tall bleachers, laughing at one another (or maybe at us), while a single figure hangs from a chain leashed to his ankle. His identity is ambiguous: acrobat or victim of torture? Don't miss the small gallery two floors below, where you'll find "Many Times," Muñoz's 1999 arrangement of a hundred identically clad resin figures, chatting in small groups or laughing to themselves. Linger and the room's silence becomes oppressive, as if you've intruded on a world with no need for the living. Through Jan. 31. (Marian Goodman, 24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.)

Edmund Teske

Always on the verge of being rediscovered, the idiosyncratic American photographer (who died in 1996) may be too sincere to come back into fashion, but his experimental approach should appeal to photography's boundary-busting avant-garde. Even Teske's most straightforward photographs have a surreal theatricality reminiscent of George Platt Lynes and John Gutmann, but he rarely left an image unmanipulated.



From 1981 to 1987, young Italian designers challenged the less-is-more ethos of modernism with an audaciously playful aesthetic, spearheaded by Ettore Sottsass (whose room divider is pictured). The Memphis Group, as they were known, is the subject of two shows, at the Koenig & Clinton gallery, in Chelsea, and the Sheftel gallery, downtown.

His figure studies and portraits (including one of Kenneth Anger) were often solarized, double-exposed, and overlaid with liquid passages of rust-colored toning. The results are agitated, feverish, and expressionist—each picture is less a document than a dream. Through Jan. 24. (Gitterman, 41 E. 57th St. 212-734-0868.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Nicolás Guagnini

The Argentinean-born, New York-based artist has covered three walls of the gallery with a heartfelt manifesto on antiquity, war photography, and psychoanalysis, but it's hard to take it too seriously, given his choice of font: a customized typeface in which the twenty-six letters of the Roman alphabet are formed out of phalluses. Also on view are glazed ceramic sculptures that jumble anatomy (penises curve around ears and jut out of feet). The decision to install most of these objects atop art books (about Donald Judd, Ed Ruscha, and Ad Reinhardt, among other subjects) does nothing to advance Guagnini's gambit. Through Jan. 10. (Bortolami, 520 W. 20th St. 212-727-2050.)

Jessica Todd Harper

This young mother of three photographs herself and her extended family at home, exploring motherhood, childhood, and intimacy in color pictures that feel more staged than spontaneous. Though the territory is familiar (Tina Barney, Sally Mann, and Elinor Carucci come to mind), Harper's approach is quietly assured, and she has a sharp eye for the cozy details of domesticity. There are no tantrums or tensions here; Harper is interested in comfort and pleasure—and in the play of light in her handsomely appointed interiors. If you're looking for gritty realism, go elsewhere. Through Jan. 10. (Wester, 511 W. 25th St. 212-255-5560.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

"Select Cuts & Alterations"

The gallery inaugurates its new storefront space with a lively show of works on paper—photography, drawing, collage—that involve hands-on manipulation. The best pieces, notably Mia Pearlman's crashing waves of cut and painted paper in the windows, dig into the connection between creation and destruction. Chris McCaw exposed his landscape photograph to the sun for so long that it burned the paper, leaving a needlelike slice in the sky. Gerald Slota's small photographs have been cut into; in one, the words "No no no no" are scrawled next to the jagged hole where a house used to be, as if by a disturbed child. Through Jan. 15. (Foley, 59 Orchard St. 212-244-9081.)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

BALVANERA

152 Stanton St. (212-533-3348)

BALVANERA IS A BARRIO in Buenos Aires where creative types once convened and, since August, is also an Argentine steak house on the Lower East Side. It's a place of modest ambition, and quiet conversation. Go with someone who loves you: the steaks come with a head of roasted garlic on the side, and there's more in the chorizo. Early in the evening, a gentle cover of "Michelle" ends, and then the only sound is the ceiling fans, whirring in defiance of the winter outside. Acknowledging that the grape's had a rough run, the waitress says her favorite wine is the Malbec, from Patagonia. It looks like ink, and tastes a little like it, too—rich and dark enough to conjure visions of windswept plains beneath Andean peaks. Another glass with the skirt steak, which comes with a peppery watercress salad and pleasingly flimsy fries. There's a bright and cheery tomato-and-onion salsa, but the assertive, verdant chimichurri (more garlic) is the condiment that runs out.

"There's going to be three courses, and everything's going to be O.K.," says the waitress at the beginning of the meal. There are things to eat besides steak, like a blood sausage that oozes out of its casing, and velvety sweetbreads the size of healthy diver scallops. The carrots in the salad—slivers of orange, pepitas, sprigs of escarole, a daub of queso fresco—were gritty one night, but on this occasion they are roasted into creaminess. Provoleta, pulled curd provolone, like the top of a pizza or French onion soup, should be eaten with bread, but it's too luxurious to sully with carbs. Adults need treats, too. Mushy ricotta cavatelli bob about in a tomato confit. The sauce, a thick and flavorful broth, turns out to be the point of the dish. What about the steaks themselves? You might wish that all four of the beef options were grass-fed (in fact, it's just the strip loin), which is the Argentine way. But the all-important crust is there, as is the distinct "añejo," or aged funk.

As one meal ends at nine o'clock, many more are just beginning. The dining room fills up, and the chill brought on by the all-glass façade subsides. Two men in sharp suits take up residence at the tiny bar in the back of the room, murmuring in Spanish and drinking something amber-colored that suggests fortified wine. A flan appears, quivering alongside a puddle of dulce de leche. The ceiling fans are still going, but there is now a hubbub in the room. The caramel is gummy and delicious and sticks to forks and teeth. The waitress was right. Everything is going to be O.K.

—Amelia Lester

Open daily for dinner. Entrées \$17-\$42.

NIGHT LIFE



Each winter since 2003, musicians from around the world have crowded into a downtown Manhattan club for Globalfest, electrifying and enlightening audiences. For this year's edition, on Jan. 11, a dozen acts are set to play three stages at Webster Hall, including the veteran a cappella pioneers (and pop-crossover artists) Zap Mama (on the left, above). Making their U.S. debuts are Bixiga 70 (on the far right), a horn-fueled big band that sounds like it's from West Africa but is actually from Brazil, and the Nile Project (center, back), a multinational collaboration of musicians from the basin of the world's longest river. Globalfest also includes American acts, and Kahulanui (center, left) is flying in from the fiftieth state with its bright, toe-tapping Hawaiian swing.

ROCK AND POP

Musicians and night-club proprietors lead complicated lives; it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

Garland Jeffreys

Last month, the *Village Voice* published its list of the sixty best songs ever written about New York City. Coming in at No. 7 was Jeffreys's "Wild in the Streets," a hissing, insinuating, insistent piece from 1973. No argument here, but you could print up a list of the Brooklyn native's catalogue, tack it to the wall, step back ten paces, and throw a dart, and you'd be almost guaranteed to hit another great New York City song. Jeffreys, who is seventy-one, is still a dynamo, and he gets a jump on the New Year's Eve celebrations with an early show at Joe's Pub. (425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. Dec. 31.)

Elton John

For the past few years, the Rocket Man has been rocking Las Vegas with "The Million Dollar Piano," his residency at Caesars Palace's Colosseum, where he plays audience favorites like "Bennie and the Jets" and "Tiny Dancer" on an L.E.D.-enhanced set of ivories. This March, he rereleased his 1973

LP, "Goodbye Yellow Brick Road," as a fortieth-anniversary deluxe edition, but the showman doesn't live solely on memory lane: last year saw the coming of his thirty-first studio album, "The Diving Board," a gorgeous opus, reminiscent of his earliest work, produced by T Bone Burnett. Remarkably, this Barclays Center show is the glitzy Brit's first one on New Year's Eve in New York City. His sassy anthem "I'm Still Standing" will be telecast live on "Dick Clark's New Year's Rockin' Eve with Ryan Seacrest 2015." (620 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. barclayscenter.com. Dec. 31.)

Rainer Maria

The turn-of-the-century emo trio reunites for (at least) one show, on New Year's Eve, eight years after its last appearance. The members of the band, led by the red-headed vocalist and bassist Caitlin De Marrais, carved a unique place for themselves among the more sentimental Brooklyn indie popsters of the early aughts, releasing albums that have become master texts in crunchy, heart-on-the-sleeve rock. They are joined by another reunited act, **Moss Icon**, a post-hardcore group from the late eighties whose one-album discography is as thrilling as it is

concentrated. (Bowery Ballroom, 6 Delancey St. 212-533-2111. Dec. 31.)

Joe Louis Walker

When he was a teen-ager, in the sixties, the San Francisco-born guitar prodigy (whose birthday is Christmas Day) accompanied some of the biggest names in the music business, as a house guitarist at the Matrix club and by backing touring artists at the Fillmore West. In 1968, he forged a friendship with the supremely gifted guitarist Mike Bloomfield, and stayed close to him until his death, in 1981. For a decade, starting in 1975, Walker performed only gospel music, but he made his debut as a blues leader with the album "Cold Is the Night" in 1986. He remains one of the most vibrant singers and shredders in the blues business. (B. B. King Blues Club & Grill, 237 W. 42nd St. 212-997-4144. Jan. 6.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

The Bad Plus

For the past few years, this trio hasn't had to fret over New Year's plans; it's found a holiday home at the venerable Village Vanguard. Now comfortable members of the jazz establishment, they recently released

their tenth studio album, "Inevitable Western," which retains an impish edge and populist charm. Here, with the rambunctious drummer Dave King on hand, no one has to worry about making too much celebratory noise. (178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Dec. 30-Jan. 4.)

Dee Dee Bridgewater

A one-woman New Year's Eve party no matter what time of year she hits a stage, Bridgewater balances her boundless energy and fervor with impeccable vocal artistry. Although she's drawn attention for earnest tributes to both Ella Fitzgerald and Billie Holiday, the Tony-winning performer has an inimitable style. (Iridium, 1650 Broadway, at 51st St. 212-582-2121. Dec. 31-Jan. 2.)

Wynton Marsalis

Most often seen among the ranks of the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, the trumpeter is still very much at home with a smaller ensemble. Leading his sharply contoured quintet affords him the chance to do what he does best: improvise with the invention and controlled abandon of a master. His group will be joined by the dancer **Jared Grimes** and the vocalist **Kate Davis**. (Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. Dec. 31.)



MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

American Sniper

Clint Eastwood's new film is a devastating pro-war movie and a devastating antiwar movie, a somber celebration of a warrior's happiness and a sorrowful lament over a warrior's alienation and misery. Eastwood, working with the screenwriter Jason Hall, has adapted the 2012 best-seller by the Navy SEAL sharpshooter Chris Kyle, who is played here by Bradley Cooper. The film is devoted to Kyle's life as a son, husband, father, and, most of all, righteous assassin—a man always sure he is defending his country in Iraq against what he calls "savages." Perched on a rooftop in Ramadi or Sadr City, he's methodical and imperturbable, and he hardly ever misses. For the role of Kyle, Cooper got all beefed up—from the looks of it, by beer as much as by iron (it's intentionally not a movie-star body). With his brothers in the field, Kyle is convivial, profane, and funny; at home with his loving wife (played by Sienna Miller, who's excellent), he's increasingly withdrawn, dead-eyed, enraptured only by the cinema of war that's playing in his mind. As Kyle and his men rampage through the rubble of Iraqi cities, the camera records exactly what's needed to dramatize a given event and nothing more. There's no waste, never a moment's loss of concentration, definition, or speed; the atmosphere of the cities, and life on the streets, gets packed into the purposeful action shots. Cinematography by Tom Stern. —*David Denby* (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/14.) (In wide release.)

Annie

Quvenzhané Wallis, playing the plucky young heroine, fills the screen with poised energy and rarely oversmiles in the director Will Gluck's updating of the musical. The script (by Gluck and Aline Brosh McKenna) transposes the original Depression-era story to current-day New York, where Will Stacks (Jamie Foxx), a telecom mogul, is running for mayor but can't overcome his public image as an out-of-touch plutocrat. When he chances to rescue the headstrong Annie from speeding traffic, his popularity soars; when her story, as a foster child in a group home, becomes known, his campaign managers (Rose Byrne and Bobby Cannavale) urge Will to take her in—until the race is won. The sentimental story of their growing bond and the obstacles posed to it by backroom dealings is familiar turf, but it plays out on unusual ground:

real-life New York locations. Though Gluck's musical numbers lack high style, they capture the spice of urban sights, uptown and downtown alike, and offer a droll paean to the power of social media. The vigorous display of good feelings and comforting resolutions has an unusually effervescent sincerity, even if the rags-to-riches wish-fulfillment leaps over all the hard knocks. As the frustrated foster mother, Cameron Diaz tears into the song "Little Girls" with memorable abandon. —*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

Antoine and Antoinette

The director Jacques Becker builds this snappy, sentimental comic melodrama, from 1947, with an accretion of streetwise details, from the stress and danger of factory work to the wiles of philandering housewives. The protagonists are a young married couple, Antoine, an earnest and capable technician, and Antoinette, a spirited and practical shopgirl, who live in a cramped walkup in a rough-and-tumble Paris neighborhood. As they struggle with daily needs and pleasures, they face the predatory pressure of businessmen and bosses—including a Mephistophelian grocer who tries to buy Antoinette's affections even as he brazenly extorts sexual favors from an employee. But Becker, whose camera ranges breezily from Métro-station ticket booths to romantic rooftops, is a sophisticate with a populist lilt: the hearty adultery of working people has a ruddy vigor absent from the merchant's cadaverous clutches. A clattery plot involving a lost lottery ticket tells an ironic tale of impossible dreams, but Becker's ecstatic, overwhelmingly intimate closeups of the couple in a tender idyll burn away daily cares with the blinding heat of erotic passion. In French. —*R.B.* (French Institute Alliance Française; Jan. 6.)

Bringing Up Baby

The enduring fascination of this 1938 screwball comedy is due to much more than its uproarious gags. Having already helped to launch the genre, the director Howard Hawks here reinvents his comic voice, establishing archetypes of theme and performance that still hold sway. He turned Cary Grant into an extension of his own intellectual irony, an absent-minded professor who seems lost in thought but awaits the chance to unleash his inner leopard. He refashioned Katharine Hepburn as a sexually determined woman who hides her aggression under intricate

scatterbrained schemes that force the deep thinker to deploy his untapped humor and virility. And Hawks brought to fruition his own universe of hints and symbols that conjure the force that rules the world: she tears his coat, he tears her dress, she steals his clothes, she names him "Bone," and the mating cries of wild animals disturb the decorum of the dinner table, even as a Freudian psychiatrist in a swanky bar gives viewers an answer key in advance. —*R.B.* (IFC Center; Jan. 1-4.)

Citizen Kane

The subject of the twenty-five-year-old Orson Welles's lightning bolt of cinematic modernism is the making of a movie—a newsreel about the late Charles Foster Kane, a fallen media mogul, whose famous last word sends a reporter scurrying far and wide in search of clues to its meaning. Kane's life emerges in flashbacks that highlight Welles's suavely domineering performance—as well as his premonitions of doom arising from his own vast ambitions. The story of a big man humbled, of preternatural energy come to grief through hubris and humiliation, is told by means of an ecstasy of light and shadow, of clashing textures and graphic forms, such as hadn't been seen since the silent era. No one but Charlie Chaplin and Erich von Stroheim had ever made the cinema such a one-man show; Welles added a willfully hyperexpressive and playful delight in technical wizardry, as well as an impulsive exuberance, tragic self-consciousness, and reflexive immediacy. He grabbed the keys to the kingdom as casually as one might take the keys to Dad's car, and suddenly other directors felt free to grab them, too. He made them all seem young and brash—or instantly old. Released in 1941. —*R.B.* (Film Forum; Jan. 1-8.)

The Imitation Game

Alan Turing (Benedict Cumberbatch), recruited into service at the start of the Second World War, presents himself at a house in the British countryside. His manner is intolerant, his demeanor is a parody of the donnish, and his task is to crack the codes—supposedly impregnable—that are being used to encrypt German communications. Fifty years ago, even to tell such a story would have been a treasonable act; the existence of Bletchley, where Turing worked, remained a state secret. Now the tale is told as a thriller, with all scientific complexity stripped away and months of patient toil pared down to a single eureka moment in a pub. We even get a spy on the premises, for good measure. Morten Tyldum's film, written by Graham Moore, chops back and forth between Turing's school days, his code-breaking, and his arrest for homosexual activity after the war. "I think Alan Turing is hiding something,"

OPENING

IN SEARCH OF GENERAL TSO

A documentary, directed by Ian Cheney, about the origins of the Chinese-American dish General Tso's Chicken. Opening Jan. 2. (In limited release.)

L'I'L QUINQUIN

Reviewed in Now Playing. Opening Jan. 2. (In limited release.)

A MOST VIOLENT YEAR

J. C. Chandor directed this drama, set in New York in 1981, about a business owner (Oscar Isaac) who faces threats from competitors, creditors, and prosecutors. Co-starring Jessica Chastain, Elyse Gabel, David Oyelowo, and Albert Brooks. Opening Dec. 31. (In limited release.)

REVIVALS AND FESTIVALS

Titles in bold are reviewed.

FILM FORUM

In revival. Dec. 31 at 12:30, 2:40, 4:45, 7, and 9:15: "The Shop Around the Corner" (1940, Ernst Lubitsch). • The films of Orson Welles. Jan. 1-3 and Jan. 5-8 at 12:30, 2:50, 5:10, 7:30, and 9:50 and Jan. 4 at 2:50, 5:10, 7:30, and 9:50: "Citizen Kane."

FILM SOCIETY OF LINCOLN CENTER

The films of John Huston. Dec. 31 at 2:15: "The Mackintosh Man" (1973). • Dec. 31 at 4:30: "The Red Badge of Courage" (1951). • Dec. 31 at 8:45: "In This Our Life" (1942). • Jan. 1 at 4, Jan. 4 at 8:30, and Jan. 5 at 3:30: "Fat City" (1972). • Jan. 1 at 6:15: "Wise Blood" (1979). • Jan. 1 at 8:30: "We Were Strangers" (1949). • Jan. 2 at 1:15 and Jan. 4 at 1: "The Roots of Heaven" (1958). • Jan. 2 at 3:45: "The Kremlin Letter" (1970). • Jan. 2 at 6:15 and Jan. 5 at 1: "White Hunter Black Heart."

FRENCH INSTITUTE ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE

"Eccentrics of French Comedy." Jan. 6 at 4 and 7:30: "Antoine and Antoinette."

IFC CENTER

"Screwball Romance." Jan. 1-4 at 11 A.M.: "Bringing Up Baby." • The films of David Cronenberg. Jan. 1-3 at midnight: "Videodrome" (1983). • "Waverly Nights." Jan. 1-3 at midnight: "Eraserhead" (1977, David Lynch).

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

"Acteurism: Joan Bennett." Dec. 31-Jan. 3 at 1:30: "Careless Lady" (1932, Kenneth MacKenna). • The films of Robert Altman. Dec. 31 at 4: "Aria" (1987, Altman, Jean-Luc Godard, Julien Temple, Bruce Beresford, Ken Russell, Derek Jarman, et al.). • Jan. 1 at 7 and Jan. 4 at 2: "Beyond Therapy" (1987). • Jan. 2 at 7: "McCabe and Mrs. Miller" (1971). • Jan. 3 at 7 and Jan. 6 at 4: "Short Cuts" (1993). • Jan. 4 at 5 and Jan. 7 at 4: "Prêt-à-Porter" (1994). • Jan. 5 at 7: "Kansas City" (1996). • Jan. 6 at 8: "The Gingerbread Man" (1998). • "The Contenders." Jan. 2 at 3:30: "Beetlejuice" (1988, Tim Burton). • Jan. 2 at 7:30: "Selma." • Jan. 3 at 3: "Batman" (1989, Burton). • Jan. 3 at 7:30: "The Missing Picture" (2014, Rithy Panh). • Jan. 4 at 2: "Pompeii" (2014, Paul W. S. Anderson). • Jan. 5 at 7:30: "Nightcrawler" (2014, Dan Gilroy), followed by a discussion with the film's star, Jake Gyllenhaal. • Jan. 6 at 7:30: "The Theory of Everything" (2014, James Marsh), followed by a discussion with the film's stars, Eddie Redmayne and Felicity Jones.

MUSEUM OF THE MOVING IMAGE

"Curators' Choice 2014." Jan. 2 at 7: "Goodbye to Language" (2014, Jean-Luc Godard). • Jan. 3 at noon: "The Wind Rises" (2014, Hayao Miyazaki). • Jan. 3 at 3: "Manakamana" (2014, Stephanie Spray and Pachó Velez). • Jan. 3 at 5:45: "The Strange Little Cat" (2013, Ramon Zürcher). • Jan. 3 at 7:30: "Stranger by the Lake" (2014, Alain Guiraudie). • Jan. 4 at 2:30: "Stray Dogs" (2014, Tsai Ming-liang). • Jan. 4 at 6: "Boyhood" (2014, Richard Linklater).



MOVIE OF THE WEEK

A video discussion of Shari Springer Berman and Robert Pulcini's "Cinema Verite," from 2011, in our digital edition and online.

an inquiring policeman says, making perfectly sure that we can connect the dots. The film is plain and stolid, and not helped by murky, computer-generated images of planes and submarines, yet the central character continues to fascinate, and Cumberbatch is in his element. —*Anthony Lane* (12/1/14) (In limited release.)

Inherent Vice

The hero of the new Paul Thomas Anderson film is Doc Sportello (Joaquin Phoenix), a hairy-cheeked, dope-wreathed private investigator who lives near a beach. The period, unsurprisingly, is 1970. Doc's latest task is to trace a batch of missing persons: Mickey Wolfmann (Eric Roberts), a property developer; Mickey's squeeze, Shasta Fay Hepworth (Katherine Waterston), who used to go out with Doc; and a wandering stoner, Coy Harlingen (Owen Wilson), who couldn't find himself in a mirror. Somehow, everything is connected, although, since the movie is adapted from a novel by Thomas Pynchon, there is a strong chance that the connections will never be explained, let alone straightened out. Subplots overwhelm plots, and one gaudily named character after another—Sauncho Smilax (Benicio del Toro), Dr. Blatnoyd (Martin Short), Japonica Fenway (Sasha Pieterse), and Petunia Leeway (Maya Rudolph)—stops by and adds to the mix. Even as the story caves in, though, what binds the movie together is Anderson's feel for the drifting, smokelike sadness in Pynchon, and the sudden shafts of bright comedy; the least inhibited performance is that of Josh Brolin, playing not a hippie but a dirty cop called Bigfoot, who sucks on chocolate-coated bananas. With Reese Witherspoon, as a deputy D.A.; armed with a business suit and coiffed hair, she's a dead ringer for Tippi Hedren. —*A.L.* (12/15/14) (In limited release.)

Li'l Quinquin

The title of Bruno Dumont's new film—first shown as a three-hour-plus television miniseries—is the nickname of a taciturn fireplug of a boy in a farm village on the northern coast of France. On the first day of summer vacation, he takes his girlfriend, Eve, and another pair of friends on a bicycle excursion in pursuit of a helicopter, which airlifts the corpse of a cow from an abandoned Second World War bunker. This surrealistic vision gives rise to a moment of horror—the corpse is stuffed with human body parts—but the police investigation that results is a quiet uproar of comic bumbling. Dumont thrusts two rustic Keystone Kops into a quasi-documentary contemplation of his own home turf; he looks longingly and lovingly at the craggy landscape, which the children roam for pleasure and the officers scour for business. The nearly anthropological look at local customs (the Bastille Day

festivities are extraordinarily detailed and teeming set pieces) doesn't spare the ugliness, from endemic and unchallenged racism to a heritage of violence. Yet the murder plot is of a piece with the bumptious comedy; the action seems to rise organically from the locale, and Dumont's grand yet intimate fiction fuses his inner world with the historical moment. In French. —*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Mr. Turner

Mike Leigh's movie about the last quarter (1826 to 1851) of J. M. W. Turner's life is a startling portrait of an obsessive artist, a famous man who lives anonymously. Turner (Timothy Spall) sleeps in his clothes and wanders alone, sketchbook in hand, through the Kentish port town of Margate and in Holland, on a bluff, staring at the sun on the horizon. Returning to his London house, storming the Royal Academy in a frock coat and top hat, he attacks his canvases like a proto-Action painter, with stabbing brush, spit, and dusty substances that he rubs in. Spall has a pared-away chin, and a small mouth pulled up toward a shapeless nose. It's a face that repels examination—his Turner wants to see, not to be seen. Or to be much heard. Indistinct syllables (varieties of grunt, snarl, and roar) emerge from the clogged drain of his throat. The period re-creation—grim, early Victorian, relieved by the ravishing countryside and sea—is the background for Turner's paintings, with their effulgence of white, gold, ochre, orange, and red. —*D.D.* (12/8/14) (In limited release.)

Selma

Like "Lincoln," Ava DuVernay's stirring movie avoids the lifetime-highlights strategy of standard biopics and concentrates instead on a convulsive political process—the events leading to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), eager to move on to the War on Poverty, is pressured to change direction by Martin Luther King, Jr. (David Oyelowo), who is fighting for voting rights in the Oval Office and on the streets of Alabama. DuVernay captures King's canny and dominating resourcefulness in strategy meetings as well as the grand rhetoric of his public speeches, and Oyelowo adds a sexiness and an altered rhythm to King's speech patterns; his King is aggressive, barbed. A sequence set on the Edmund Pettus Bridge, as hundreds of protesters advance across the span and the Alabama state troopers terrorize them with tear gas, recalls the magnificent crowd scenes from Soviet silent classics by Eisenstein and Pudovkin. With Carmen Ejogo, as Coretta Scott King; Colman Domingo, as the Reverend Ralph Abernathy; Tim Roth, as Governor George Wallace; and Oprah Winfrey, as the civil-rights activist Annie Lee Cooper. The script was written by Paul Webb and DuVernay (who is uncredited);

the cinematography is by Bradford Young. —*D.D.* (In wide release.)

Top Five

Chris Rock wrote, directed, and stars in this genial, splendidly constructed, occasionally hilarious comic drama with a reflexive twist. He plays André Allen, a beloved comedian whose forays into writing and directing have met with critical brickbats. To promote his latest effort—a historical drama about a nineteenth-century Haitian freedom fighter—he lets himself be profiled by Chelsea Brown (Rosario Dawson), a journalist from the *Times*, who follows him everywhere, becomes a part of his life, and sparks both reminiscence and romance. Along the way, André's disclosures take a sombre turn, and the personal demons that he dredges up come back to challenge him. Rock doesn't hide the nods to "Annie Hall" and "Stardust Memories," but there's a limit to his self-derision and self-revelation; André's foibles stay close to the surface, and much of the humor remains sketchlike. Several strong scenes, though, capture deeply sedimented pain in swift turns of phrase, unfolding broad strains of experience that all too rarely come to light, those of a black man in a predominantly white business. The sequence that gives the film its title is destined to be a classic. —*R.B.* (In wide release.)

Unbroken

An interminable, redundant, unnecessary epic devoted to suffering, suffering, suffering. The great young Irish actor Jack O'Connell stars as the American Olympic runner Louis Zamperini, who survives forty-seven days in the Pacific, on a raft, after his B-24 ditches in 1942. Zamperini then spends three years in Japanese prison camps, where he is beaten again and again, and endures one grotesque punishment in which the entire population of prisoners, one after another, must punch him in the face. You feel like yelling "Cut!" to the director, Angelina Jolie, who confuses long scenes of sadism with truth-telling. O'Connell's tormenter is a repressed homosexual (Miyavi, the smooth-faced Japanese pop star) who loves Zamperini and can't stop attacking him—a tired trope from the Freudian Hollywood of the forties. In large set pieces, Jolie is more than competent, but the movie feels derivative and short of ideas, other than the notion that endurance makes a man great. —*D.D.* (In wide release.)

White Hunter Black Heart

In his 1990 film à clef about the making of "The African Queen," Clint Eastwood seems to be having the time of his life playing the director John Wilson (a version of John Huston) as a despicable yet alluring Hollywood egomaniac. Lending Wilson an orotund imperiousness and a high-handed gestural repertoire, Eastwood conjures

both the legendary grandeur and the destructive self-indulgence of Hollywood's golden age (which, as a young actor, he caught on its way out). The movie is based on a novel by Peter Viertel, one of Huston's screenwriters on the 1951 adventure film, which was largely shot on location in Uganda. Here, he's called Pete Verrill and is played by Jeff Fahey as an unwilling but curious onlooker at the disaster unleashed by Wilson's obsession with elephant hunting at the expense (both financial and moral) of the film. Eastwood's subject is wasted lives and wasted talent; Wilson's charisma and Hollywood's money prove irresistible, and their sheer power brings noteworthy results—but they emerge from a needless vortex of ruin. The New Hollywood, to which Eastwood's mournful artistry belongs, comes off as a cinematic phoenix.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Jan. 2 and Jan. 5.)

Wild

Another woman-schlepping-across-the-desert movie ("Tracks," with Mia Wasikowska, came out earlier this year), but this is a good one. Grief-stricken over her mother's death and divorced from her loving husband (whom she has cheated on repeatedly), Cheryl Strayed (Reese Witherspoon) walks eleven hundred miles, through desert, bush, and snowy mountains, from Mojave, California, to the Oregon-Washington border. Each stopping place in the wilderness is a kind of marker on the road to redemption—or, at least, to exhaustion. Sweating and freezing, she wants to expunge loss and self-disgust from her soul. Witherspoon is first-rate—an economical but expressive actress playing an intelligent, well-read, ambitious, but screwed-up woman. And a sexual woman, too: all her encounters with men (the main population of the Pacific Crest Trail) are fraught with possibility and danger. Strayed's best-selling account of her adventures was adapted by the novelist and screenwriter Nick Hornby and directed by the French-Canadian filmmaker Jean-Marc Vallée. They make one serious mistake—the repeated use of hectic and crowded flashbacks to convey what's in Strayed's head at key moments in the story. We wind up watching film editing, not consciousness.—*D.D.* (12/8/14) (In limited release.)

Winter Sleep

This double-length sentimental drama is set in a village in rural Turkey, where the grizzled, middle-aged Aydin—a hotelier, landlord, retired actor, and minor littérateur—arouses the enmity of a poor family as a result of overzealous attempts to collect overdue rent. But the dreamy aesthete was unaware of the harsh actions, which were taken by his right-hand man, and he hopes to set matters right. The minor disturbance throws things out of balance in Aydin's household, which includes his sister Necla, a bitter and lonely divorcée, and his urbane young wife, Nihal, who is bored and frustrated away from city life and throws herself into charity work. The director, Nuri Bilge Ceylan, who co-wrote the screenplay with his wife, Ebru Ceylan, based the film on stories by Chekhov, and its roots show. They spice the script with blunt references to tensions in Turkish society, including economic inequality, the official role of religion, and the fear of censorship. But Ceylan paces this thin dramatic sketch as if it were a Wagner opera, with ponderous pauses and fraught gazes yearning toward depths that the movie doesn't reach. The actors deliver their lines with predictable tones; unusual and enticing landscapes are mainly decorative; there's a lack of information, imagination, context, and inner life; and the three-hour-plus running time makes the movie's title seem snarkily apt. In Turkish and English.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)



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New York City Ballet / "The Nutcracker"

Mice dance, snowflakes whirl, and a little girl defeats the forces of darkness with the toss of a slipper. You can't go wrong with George Balanchine's "Nutcracker," immensely popular since its creation, in 1954. It's not too long—about two hours, including intermission—and offers a nice balance of pure dance, impeccable storytelling, and simple, satisfying stage magic. (David H. Koch, Lincoln Center. 212-496-0600. Dec. 31 and Jan. 2-3.)

Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo

The Trocks are back. For forty years, these guys have been spoofing ballet with incomparable panache. The secret is that they're really quite good—their pointe work rivals that of many female dancers. This year's première is a rarity, a reconstruction of the 1843 French ballet "La Naïade et le Pêcheur" (also known as "On-dine"), reimagined through the lens of an early-twentieth-century Russian revival. Other numbers include the evergreen "Go for Barocco"—a twist on Balanchine—and "Patterns in Space," inspired by the complexities and seriousness of Merce Cunningham. (Joyce

Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 31 and Jan. 2-4.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

In its final week at City Center, the company scrolls through its new acquisitions. Men act like apes in Hofesh Shechter's "Uprising," women struggle to break free in Jacquelyn Buglisi's "Suspended Women," a star couple shares an intimate moment in Christopher Wheeldon's "After the Rain," and nearly everyone has a good time in Matthew Rushing's "Odetta." The New Year's Eve show is traditionally graced by surprise alumni, and the final performance samples from the whole season before serving up one last "Revelations." (131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 31 and Jan. 2-4.)

COIL 2015 / Faye Driscoll

P.S. 122 is holding its annual winter festival while still in exile from its home base (which is getting a much needed renovation). At Danspace, Faye Driscoll will reprise "Thank You for Coming: Attendance," a work that goes further than most in its exploration of audience participation. As part of Driscoll's idea of performance as "both a collective and a political act," viewers

stand, move, wear costumes, and trade props with the dancers; at one point, their names are integrated into the text of a song. The piece is performed in the round; as it progresses, the distance that separates viewer from participant disintegrates, and a kind of playful anarchy ensues. (St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Jan. 6. Through Jan. 10.)

Africa Umoja

Arriving in time to alleviate the winter blues, this touring production from South Africa is all heart. Its strength is its spirit, the sincere joy emanating from a cast of thirty-two eager-to-please singers, dancers, and musicians. Theatrically, it is unsophisticated, an episodic pageant skimming across mostly brighter moments in South African history and incorporating American gospel music and Martin Luther King, Jr. The dancing encompasses Zulu stomps, gumboot rhythm-fests, and quick-footed township styles. (Symphony Space, Broadway at 95th St. 212-864-5400. Jan. 6. Through Jan. 10.)

BODYTRAFFIC

Swiftly garnering acclaim since its founding, in 2007, this Los Angeles



repertory company has managed to attract a terrific crew of dancers, each with high-calibre technique and a distinctive presence. The taste in choreographers shown by its two artistic directors is less enticing, gravitating toward trendy. For this visit, they bring "Dust," a début by the overexposed Hofesh Shechter, and "Once Again, Before You Go," a New York première by the Montreal-based choreographer Victor Quijada, known for his street-meets-modern style. Richard Siegal, whose last piece for the troupe captured the effervescence of jazz pop, works in a similar vein for the duet "The New 45." (Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Jan. 6. Through Jan. 10.)

THE THEATRE



OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS COIL 2015

The annual festival, presented by P.S. 122, includes Mike Iveson's "Sorry Robot"; "YOUARENOWHERE," by Andrew Schneider; Bojana Novakovic's "The Blind Date Project"; and the TEAM's "Roosevelt." Opens Jan. 2. (Various locations. 212-352-3101.)

Constellations

Jake Gyllenhaal and Ruth Wilson star in a new play by Nick Payne, which imagines the possibilities of the relationship between a man and the physicist he falls in love with. Michael Longhurst directs. In previews. (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200.)

Into the Woods

Roundabout Theatre Company presents Fiasco Theatre's unplugged version of the 1987 musical by Stephen Sondheim, with a book by James Lapine, featuring eleven actors and one piano. Directed by Noah Brody and Ben Steinfeld. In previews. (Laura Pels, 111 W. 46th St. 212-719-1300.)

Rock Bottom

Bridget Everett reprises her show from last fall. Music and lyrics are by Everett, Marc Shaiman, and Scott Wittman, with Adam Ad-Rock

Horovitz and Matt Ray. Wittman directs. Opens Jan. 6. (Joe's Pub, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Winners and Losers

Chris Abraham directs the New York première of a play created and performed by Marcus Youssef and James Long, about the friendship of two fortysomethings, which gets tested in the course of a parlor game. Previews begin Jan. 2. Opens Jan. 6. (SoHo Rep, 46 Walker St. 212-352-3101.)

NOW PLAYING

The Elephant Man

Bernard Pomerance's 1977 play is based on the true story of Joseph Merrick, some twenty years after his birth, in Leicester in 1862. Merrick's body began its amazing transformation early on: his head was covered in growths, and his right arm was a useless club. After years as a touring exhibit, Merrick (Bradley Cooper, who does a bang-up job physically and aurally) is brought to London Hospital by Frederick Treves (Alessandro Nivola, a study in charisma). Treves introduces Mrs. Kendal (Patricia Clarkson) to Merrick at the hospital, believing that because she's trained in the art of illusion she'll be able to hide her

response to Merrick's deformities, and thus make the Elephant Man feel more like a man. The director, Scott Ellis, hasn't decided whether the story should be played for its narrative pathos or as something more stylized. Treves, our de-facto narrator, represents both approaches, and Ellis has given Nivola little help in making them cohere. Cooper, as that brilliant misfit, is all pathos. Clarkson, with her signature warm and vibrating voice, is commanding and true. (Reviewed in our issue of 12/22 & 29/14.) (Booth, 222 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Every Brilliant Thing

Duncan Macmillan's short play (sixty minutes with no intermission) about a young boy's attempts to ease his mother's depression is a solo show with a hundred-and-ninety-nine-seat cast. The performer and co-writer Jonny Donahoe speaks the bulk of the lines, then recruits dozens of audience members to intone the rest. One plays a veterinarian, another a lover, another a university lecturer. Others lend books and socks and then coast. The rest read from the titular list that Donahoe's character assembles, a catalogue of all that's great and good in the world: otters, seashells, inappropriate songs played at emotional moments, "Columbo." One night, with his roly-poly body and pale-pink shirt, Donahoe looked like a cross between a man and a chunk of Hubba Bubba. His mien was so sweet, his crowd work so gently cajoling, he seemed like a

walking empathy turbine. The work he performs is naïve and sentimental, and quite moving, too. (Barrow Street Theatre, 27 Barrow St. 212-868-4444.)

Pocatello

One of the great things about the playwright Samuel D. Hunter's work is that he treats the corner of the world he's interested in describing—Middle America—as exceptional because of the interesting people and stories one can find there. In his latest play, directed by Davis McCallum, Eddie (the fantastic T. R. Knight) runs an Italian restaurant in Idaho that's frequented by people he knows, right down to family members, while it's staffed by folks he has some personal relationship to. What Eddie's friends don't know is that he's been funnelling his earnings back into the restaurant to keep it open so that there is something in his world that is intimate and not a part of a chain. When the truth comes out, though, Eddie's very idea of family splinters further, leaving him even more isolated than when the play began. As Eddie, Knight is so good you want him to go on as Hunter's muse. Despite his performance, however, and that of the outstanding Jessica Dickey, as the alcoholic wife of one of the restaurant workers, the play is slight and tedious—it should have been a one-act. As is, the poetry gets subsumed by the conventional structure and predictable thinking. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. Through Jan. 4.)



CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Franz Lehár's **"The Merry Widow"** travelled the world in triumph for nearly a century before it arrived at the Met. Tim Albery's inaugural production, in 2000, leavened the operetta's sumptuous Viennese traditions with tart but entertaining irony. Now, in her Met début, Susan Stroman, a choreographer and director who's as American as apple pie, brings her considerable talents to a new staging (sung in English) starring not only Renée Fleming and Nathan Gunn, as Hanna and Danilo, but also the Broadway star Kelli O'Hara (another début) and the tenor Alek Shrader, as the second amorous couple, to whom Lehár also gave some delightful music. The glorious Thomas Allen, himself a fine Danilo in his prime, takes the buffo role of Baron Zeta; Andrew Davis conducts. (Dec. 31 at 7, Jan. 3 at 8, and Jan. 6 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** Richard Jones's production of **"Hansel and Gretel,"** gaudy and dark and fun for all ages, is this year's family presentation, performed in English and offered at special mat-

inée times. Humperdinck's gently post-Wagnerian score will be intoned by Christine Rice and Heidi Stober in the title roles, with Michaela Martens, as Gertrude (the mother), and Robert Brubaker, as the Witch, one of the juiciest travesty roles in the repertoire; Andrew Davis. (Jan. 1 at 6 and Jan. 3 at 1.) • Sonja Frisell's time-honored production of **"Aida"** has all the gilded grandeur of a Cecil B. De Mille movie. Marco Armiliato conducts a revival that features Tamara Wilson, Violeta Urmana, Marcello Giordani, George Gagnidze, and Dimitry Belosselskiy in the leading roles. (Marjorie Owens and Carl Tanner substitute for Wilson and Giordani in the first performance.) (Jan. 2 and Jan. 5 at 7:30.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

The dazzling young Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov is the guest artist for the conducting début of the well-travelled Spanish maestro Juanjo Mena, currently the chief conductor of the BBC Philharmonic, in Manchester. Trifonov's choice of Rachmaninoff's First Piano Concerto, more brash and bold than the ubiquitous Second and Third, is a sign of his self-assurance; the piece is bookended by two very popular Russian works, Rimsky-Korsakov's "Capriccio Espagnol" and Tchaikovsky's Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique." (Dec. 30 and Jan. 6 at 7:30 and Jan. 2-3 at 8.) • The Philharmonic marks the passing of the year with the conductor Bramwell Tovey at the helm, an avuncular host who enjoys his forays into the lighter side of the repertoire. This New Year's Eve, it's "A Gershwin

Celebration," an evening with the vocalists Dianne Reeves and Norm Lewis (with a jazz trio), which offers such works as the "Cuban Overture" and "Catfish Row" (a suite from "Porgy and Bess"), as well as a generous selection of favorites from the Gershwin songbook. (Dec. 31 at 7:30.) (Avery Fisher Hall. 212-875-5656.)

Trinity Church Twelfth Night Festival

Wall Street may be a swirl of commerce, but Trinity Church's latest big-bang festival—guided, of course, by its director of music and the arts, Julian Wachner—will celebrate the Christmas season with a schedule of concerts that not only delves into the Christian musical traditions of both Western and Eastern Europe but also gives ample space to contemporary voices. A selection follows. Dec. 31 and Jan. 1 at 6: The music of Rachmaninoff's "All-Night Vigil" lasts only ninety minutes, but this presentation by the Clarion Choir, under the direction of Steven Fox (a Russian-music expert), should give audiences a strong sensation of the vast expressive stillness that lies at the heart of Orthodox liturgical practice. • Jan. 2 at 6 and Jan. 4 at 3: George Frideric Handel brought the same dramatic energy to his English-language oratorios that, in an earlier stage of his career, he gave to his Italian operas. The up-and-coming director James Darrah mounts a fully staged version of **"Saul"** (which uses a libretto by Charles Jennens, who worked with Handel on "Messiah") in the church, with Wachner conducting the Choir of Trinity Wall Street and the Trinity Baroque Orchestra; Christopher Dylan Herbert, Anthony

Roth Costanzo, and Ryland Angel take the Biblical roles of Saul, David, and Jonathan, respectively. • Jan. 5 at 6: The cutting-edge vocal octet Roomful of Teeth performs its signature piece—Caroline Shaw's Pulitzer Prize-winning Partita for Eight Voices—along with recent a-cappella works by Rinde Eckert, Brad Wells, Eric Dudley, and Judd Greenstein. (Broadway at Wall St. For tickets and full schedule, visit gemsny.org.)

Artek: "Music for a Prince"

The long-established period-performance group, under the command of the harpsichordist Gwendolyn Toth, uses the holiday season as a fine excuse to expand to small-orchestra size to take on wonderful symphonies by Joseph Haydn (including No. 6, "Le Matin," and No. 49, "La Passione"), written for the discerning ear of his patron of three decades, Prince Nikolaus Esterházy. (Immanuel Lutheran Church, 122 E. 88th St. gemsny.org. Jan. 3 at 8.)

RECITALS

Bargemusic Here and Now Winter Festival

The little chamber-music series that could launches its New Year schedule with a recent tradition at the barge, a mini-festival of new music. The Horszowski Trio and the pianists Ursula Oppens and Marc Peloquin are among the performers in pieces by such composers as Annie Gosfield, David Del Tredici ("Mandengo"), Brett Dean (a New York premiere), and Roger Stubbiefield (the world premiere of his Piano Trio). (Fulton Ferry Landing, Brooklyn. bargemusic.org. Jan. 1-3 at 8 and Jan. 4 at 4.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

"The Court of the Snow Queen"

With steampunk circus parties, all-night speakeasies, vintage-costume spectacles, and brass-band revels in Russian bathhouses already to its credit, New York's underground party curator Gemini & Scorpio is pulling out all the stops with this New Year's Eve immersive theatrical experience. The evening interprets the wintry fairy tale through aerial artistry, dancers, custom video art, live music, and other forms of spectacle. Formal attire or wonderland-themed costumes are required (think "mythical creatures, icy courtiers"), and white and silver face and body painting will be offered. There will also be absinthe and other delightful potions. Recommended

for those who don't mind waking up bleary-headed on New Year's Day. (Irondale Center, 85 S. Oxford St., Brooklyn. geminilandscorpio.com. Dec. 31, starting at 9.)

New Year's Day Swim

Bernard Adolphus McFadden, who was born in 1868, changed his name slightly, to Bernarr Macfadden, reportedly because he wanted his first name to sound more like a lion's roar and he desired a more masculine spelling for his surname. Fearlessness was not something he embraced in name only, as he regularly confronted New York's icy Atlantic in the wintertime, believing frigid dips boosted stamina, virility, and immunity. He founded the country's oldest winter bathing

organization in 1903, the Coney Island Polar Bear Club, which, to this day, continues to lead the bold and the mad into freezing waters. Its best known event is the annual New Year's Day plunge, which benefits Camp Sunshine, a nonprofit serving children with life-threatening illnesses and their families. Recommended for those in need of quickly clearing their heads. (The Boardwalk at Stillwell Ave., Brooklyn. polarbearclub.org. Jan. 1 at 1.)

READINGS AND TALKS

New Year's Day Marathon Readings

Some hundred and forty writers, musicians, dancers, and other artists—including Anselm Berrigan, Dael Orlandersmith, Dorothy Friedman August, Dorothea Lasky, Eileen Myles, JD Samson, John S. Hall, Jonas Mekas, Lenny Kaye, Penny Arcade, Philip Glass, Todd Colby, Tom Savage, Ursula Eagly, Yoshiko Chuma, Yuko Otomo, and Vito Acconci—are set to perform at the Poetry Project's forty-first annual marathon benefit reading. (131 E. 10th St., at Second Ave. Jan. 1, starting at 2. For more information, visit poetryproject.org.) On the same day, scores of folks of a similar bent are expected to gather at the Nuyorican Poets Café, for the twenty-first annual Alternative New Year's Day Spoken Word/Performance Extravaganza. (236 E. 3rd St., between Avenues B and C. Jan. 1, starting at 2.)



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

SOUTHERN HONEYMOON

“We love Mississippi,” Jocelyn Pritchett wrote in a blog last month. “The people in this state are generous, kind and loving, and it’s a great place to raise a family.” No doubt that’s true, except that Mississippi refused to acknowledge that Pritchett, a civil engineer, was a married woman. In 2013, in Maine, she had wed Carla Webb, with whom she is raising a six-year-old girl and a two-year-old boy. Both women were born in Mississippi and live there, but the law in their home state said that only one of them had parental rights, so Pritchett and Webb, along with another couple, Andrea Sanders and Rebecca Bickett, the mothers of twin toddler boys, filed suit. In November, Judge Carlton Reeves heard the case in the United States Courthouse in Jackson. It was an unusually chilly day—down to thirty-six degrees—and one lawyer made a joke that turned on the possibility of certain regions freezing over. He said, “Your Honor, many have said that before a court in Mississippi seriously considered same-sex marriage it would be a cold day. It’s a cold day.”

It’s been a year and a half since the Supreme Court declared, in *United States v. Windsor*, that the Defense of Marriage Act—which prevented the federal government from recognizing same-sex marriages, even if individual states did—violated the Constitution. The decision did not assert a larger constitutional right to marriage, but that didn’t stop lower-court judges from finding one in its reasoning. In October, the Court declined to hear challenges to such rulings from three circuits, thus bringing the number of marriage-equality states to thirty-five—including, remarkably, South Carolina. In November, however, the Sixth Circuit upheld bans in four states, and appeals to that decision may force the Court to finally rule in 2015 on whether same-sex couples in all fifty states have a constitutional right to marry.

At this point, the marriage-equality map looks essentially like a CNN pro-

jection for a Democratic electoral landslide, with New England and the mid-Atlantic states, plus a good part of the Midwest, the Southwest, the lower Rockies, and the West Coast. But gays and lesbians can also wed in states that the Democrats can only dream of carrying: Utah (after a lawsuit brought by three couples, one of whom runs a hummus business in Salt Lake City, which sells “hummosexual” T-shirts) and Oklahoma (where two Tulsa women filed a suit a decade ago). The final fortress, with the exception of South Carolina, is the Deep South. That is where the last legal battles are likely to be fought, and it is precisely the sort of place that gay-marriage opponents say shouldn’t be rushed by the courts, because it’s “not ready.”

Judge Jeffrey Sutton, who wrote the opinion for the Sixth Circuit, took up the not-ready argument, asking, “Who decides?” He meant the courts or the states, acting through their legislatures or ballot initiatives, which he called, echoing old states-rights arguments, “less expedient, but usually reliable.” He suggested that gays and lesbians, rather than fighting in a courtroom, would find it more rewarding to gradually win over “heads and hearts” in their communities and enjoy “earned

victories” at the polls. The plaintiffs in the 1967 Supreme Court decision *Loving v. Virginia* would likely have disagreed. That decision struck down laws banning interracial marriage in sixteen states—many of them the states that currently ban gay marriage.

One response to Judge Sutton’s question is that the courts are where the least powerful and the least accepted members of society can seek recourse. Mississippi has been a hard place for gays and lesbians: in 2004, the state’s marriage ban was approved by eighty-six per cent of voters. Recent polls indicate that the opposition has moderated; indeed, Southern traditionalism may make cases that involve families resonate all the more. (According to the Williams Institute, at the



U.C.L.A. law school, seventeen per cent of same-sex couples in New York are raising children. In Mississippi, twenty-six per cent are.) But it takes real obstinacy to tell couples who can't legally share custody of their kids that it would be best for all concerned if they waited until they were more popular.

Judge Reeves, who heard the Mississippi case, graduated from Jackson State, a historically black college. When the lawyers for the state talked about the benefits of "orderly" change, not rushed by the courts, Reeves interrupted them. *Brown v. Board of Education* was decided in 1954 and, he said, "in Mississippi, it was 1970 before my first-grade class was integrated." He then asked the lawyers to explain the "rational basis" for denying couples the right to marry—and their children the right to married parents—adding, "All a child wants is to be loved. They don't care by whom or what."

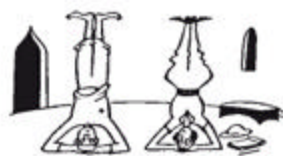
The courts are not simply a check on the democratic process but a part of it. Across the country, men and women have filed declarations, testified, gone to trial, and appealed. If voting is an act of participatory democracy, so are those actions. Southerners with cases pending include a widow in Georgia, who doesn't want her wife's death certificate to bear a box checked "never married," and two female Atlanta police officers, who want to be sure that each is recognized as a spouse and a parent in case one is killed in the line of duty.

The great achievement of Windsor has been to force states to explain why same-sex couples should be treated differently. For lack of any logical argument, some opponents make the "irresponsible procreation" case, which holds, perplexingly, that marriage should be reserved for a man and a woman because only they can have sex that results in accidental pregnancy. As Judge Richard Posner has written, "Heterosexuals get drunk and pregnant, producing unwanted children; their reward is to be allowed to marry. Homosexual couples do not produce unwanted children; their reward is to be denied the right to marry. Go figure."

The lawyers in Judge Reeves's courtroom tried that argument, too. It didn't work. Two days before Thanksgiving, Reeves ruled for the plaintiffs, writing, "Tradition will not suffice to uphold Mississippi's marriage ban." He cited the "overlapping" record of discrimination in America. (Bayard Rustin's name appears in the decision twenty times.) "Gay and lesbian citizens cannot be subjected to such second-class citizenship," he wrote. Reeves granted a stay, pending an appeal to the Fifth Circuit, to be argued on January 9th, when the Mississippi case will be joined with others from Texas and Louisiana. Otherwise, he saw no reason to wait.

—Amy Davidson

DEPT. OF GETTING BETTER SEVEN MINUTES



Here we are hibernating, cleaning out the icebox as well as the inbox. What's this? "New York is the seventh worst city for an active lifestyle." So goes the subject line on a neglected e-mail from a social-media firm called WalletHub. Seventh worst out of how many cities? A hundred. That's bad, though not quite as bad as Jersey City or Newark (second and third worst) or the class goat, Laredo. The best city for an active life style—according to WalletHub's calculations, which take into account the percentage of a city's citizens who "participate in any physical activity," its fitness-club fees, and its per-capita number of ball fields, golf courses, and swimming pools—is Omaha, Nebraska. WalletHub doesn't seem to count sidewalks, dance clubs, roller rinks, or handball courts. WalletHub needs to get out more.

Still, we can do better. It's that time of year when we like to say we will. Another overlooked e-mail links to a story

about something called Misogi, with a photo of a man running underwater carrying a rock the size of a cinder block: "Misogi is the punishing one-day workout you've never heard of, but it could change your life—if it doesn't kill you first." Here's a note from the nurse.

There must be an easier way. Earlier this month, *Time* promoted the so-called one-minute workout, based on research involving fourteen overweight test subjects in Ontario. But come on, now. The seven-minute workout is more viable—to indolence what Lipitor is to heart disease. In 2013, the American College of Sports Medicine's *Health & Fitness Journal* asserted that you can get lean with just seven minutes of intensive circuit training a day—"maximum results with minimum investment." There's no need for weights, to say nothing of swimming pools. Basically, you do the following things in quick succession for thirty seconds apiece, with a ten-second rest between each: jumping jacks, wall sit, push-ups, abdominal crunches, step-ups onto a chair, squats, triceps dips with a chair, plank, high-kneed running in place, lunges, pushups (with rotation), and, finally, side plank. It's supposed to be difficult and unpleasant (no pain/gain), but it's over fast, and, in theory anyway, it allows for twenty-three hours and

fifty-three minutes of sloth. Beats death by Misogi.

The length of the workout seems arbitrary, but it turns out that seven minutes, as a unit of time, has elemental and panacean properties. Paula Deen pitches a seven-minute frosting recipe ("Total Time: 12 min"). People in L.A. drive for seven hours to taste the seven-minute eggs in Nevada City. A pastor in Indiana has been preaching "the seven-minute marriage solution." Marriage, we're often told, takes work, but in this scenario just four hundred and twenty seconds of work each day will do. It so happens that seven minutes is the purported average span for sexual intercourse—even if studies show that nearly fifty per cent of men finish within two minutes. (Italian researchers recently had a group of premature ejaculators undergo twelve weeks of pelvic-floor exercises—it's unclear how many minutes per day—and found that their longevity increased by nearly five hundred per cent.) "The Seven Minutes," Irving Wallace's 1969 novel about an obscenity trial, has as its premise a pornographic novel that describes the thoughts passing through a woman's mind during sex. Russ Meyer made a movie out of it, which, the *Times* complained, featured only five seconds of nudity.

These seven minutes are related to, but very rarely the same as, those experienced by participants in the old party game *Seven Minutes in Heaven*, in which teens randomly pair up for a short stint in a closet, to talk or grope. *Jet*, in 1953, called it “a variation of the sex lottery . . . evidently first practiced by teenagers in Cincinnati and branded by that city’s Rev. Benjamin F. Judd as the ‘Devil’s Game.’” (Cincinnati: thirteenth most active.) Seven is indeed both hellish and heavenly. You’ve got your deadly sins and your days of the week; since God created the world in six and rested on the last, you might say that idleness was baked into the number seven at the Creation.

Here comes another alert, from the blog publisher Medium: the ideal Internet post, for attracting attention, takes seven minutes to read—that is, if you care, as Medium does, “less about clicks and more about actual reading.” It’s not clear whether a regimen of pelvic exercises or running underwater with a boulder might cause one to read faster, but there is a writer named Jason Fladlien who is hawking a method (for thirty-seven dollars) that will enable anyone to write an article about anything in seven minutes or less. Fladlien budgets thirty seconds for an opening paragraph, two to four minutes for your three main paragraphs, and another thirty seconds for the conclusion, the rest for prep and proofreading. “The cool thing about using these templates is you never have to pause to think,” he writes, but “you also have enough leeway so each article remains 100% unique, and of the highest quality.” Good. Done. Now for some jumping jacks.

—Nick Paumgarten

THE PICTURES OIL MAN



When the director J. C. Chandor lived in Williamsburg, nearly a decade back, he saw the local Bayside Fuel Oil Depot—a rusting snakework of pipes and valves and heating-oil

tanks atop a brownfield—as an emblem that, in the dark past, could have gleamed like the future. Chandor’s “A Most Violent Year,” set in 1981, débuts this week: Abel Morales (Oscar Isaac), a heating-oil dealer who cloaks his ambitions beneath a suave manner and a camel-hair topcoat, has thirty days to find a million and a half dollars to complete his purchase of the Bayside property—as his trucks are being hijacked and he’s under criminal investigation.

One recent afternoon, Chandor, a gregarious forty-one-year-old with a Foghorn Leghorn voice, climbed the stairs that wreath Bayside’s Tank 4 and stood on its crown, gazing across Bushwick Inlet at Manhattan. His thick black hair was wedged under a “Standard Oil” cap—Morales’s fictional company. “I used to come sneaking up here when this was *all* fuel-storage tanks, from the Williamsburg Bridge to the canal,” he said. Parks and galleries now dot the waterfront, and Bayside hasn’t stored oil for several years, but Chandor relished the air’s lingering petroleum tang. “I have this obsession with polluted former-industrial neighborhoods, much to my wife’s chagrin,” he said. “We now live in the woods in outer, outer Westchester, so you see who won that argument.”

At the foot of the tank, he searched for shell casings from the movie’s final showdown, souvenirs that might have got buried in the deep snow that covered the ground when they filmed. Then, after skipping over a steeplechase of pipes and striding past empty loading bays, he pointed out the film’s fleet of thirty-year-old “Standard Oil” trucks, snub-nosed tankers he’d painted hunter green. “There’s the one we flipped over, the poor thing,” he said, indicating a dinged-up rig. “They were state of the art at the time, but now they’re called something horrible like suicide cabs, because they don’t have the engine in front to protect you.”

Chandor’s screenplay begins with the city’s crime statistics from 1980: murders, 2,228; violent crimes, 180,235. It was New York’s nadir, the climate in which the subway shooter Bernie Goetz began carrying a gun. Accordingly, the film is all shadows and blight. “The clothing silhouettes had moved

to the eighties by then,” Chandor said, “but you still had the beautiful color palette of the seventies—that gauze and velour. Plus, around here heating oil was so expensive that everyone bricked in their windows to save money, so interiors were darker.”

Not only is the film’s murk worthy of Sidney Lumet but Oscar Isaac sports a Treat Williams-style pompadour; runs through the streets like Dustin Hoffman in “Marathon Man”; and simmers under pressure like Al Pacino



J. C. Chandor

in “The Godfather.” “Negative reviews have pointed to the film as a retread,” Chandor said, “but I was trying to play off our memory of gangster films. So there are two big chase sequences, which all gangster films have, and, as the film opens, Anna”—Abel’s wife, played by Jessica Chastain—“is brushing her hair and wearing lingerie, because that’s the way femmes fatales are introduced. And when the heating-oil owners sit around the restaurant table, waiting for Abel, it feels like the scene that always turns into a shootout.”

This time, it doesn’t. Over a bowl of chowder at a nearby café, Chandor explained that after his first film, “Margin Call,” came out, in 2011, “of the fifty films I was offered, forty-five were violent and thirty were gratuitously violent.” He went on, “In the middle of that, Sandy Hook happened, two towns over from where our daughter was in first grade, and her school put an armed guard out front. So I’m staring down at these scripts, thinking, Have I really

worked all this time so I can spend six months thinking of an interesting way for an assassin to kill someone for fun?” Instead, he made “All Is Lost,” in which Robert Redford spends the film frowning at his foundering sailboat.

Chandor removed his cap and leaned forward. “In 1981, the city was either going to become a post-industrial wasteland where we’d all walk around with holsters or—like Abel, who sees that escalation only makes things worse—it would follow the path to renewal, the path we walk today.” That path, delightful as it has proved for developers and straphangers, may leave moviegoers wanting more. “At the Los Angeles premiere,” Chandor said, “the audience exploded when Jessica shoots a deer—‘Finally, someone grows a pair and shoots *something*.’” With a sigh, he reminded those who view all of life as a gangster film that, “nine times out of ten in America, if you grow a big business you may have fudged your taxes or stepped on a few toes, but you probably didn’t actually kill anyone.”

—Tad Friend

DOS AND DON'TS HEAVY PETTING



Several hundred of those cheerful and unembarrassable souls whose calling it is to teach about the birds and the bees found, at the Center for Sex Education’s recent national conference, that there was something for everyone. There were sessions on sex for old people and sex after weight-loss surgery; sex ed in Sweden and sex ed in Mauritius. In the ballroom, authors signed books—“When Kayla Was Kyle,” “Not Your Mother’s Meatloaf.” Outside in the hallway, the inventor of the Wondrous Vulva Puppet peddled her satiny wares.

In a room on the third floor, a workshop on communication with trans*- and queer*-identified individuals was taking place. (“Trans” with an asterisk means someone who identifies with any of a welter of finely honed descriptions—

genderfluid, genderqueer, two-spirit, agender, third-gender, etc. “Queer” with an asterisk indicates someone who isn’t straight but may not be exactly gay, either.) The workshop was led by a pierced young man named Simon Pedisich, who teaches sex ed to the deaf, and Al Vernacchio, a friendly man wearing a pink shirt, a striped tie, and a blue sweater vest, who taught sex ed at a Quaker school in Philadelphia.

As an icebreaking exercise, Vernacchio had the participants pronounce a sexual term, in a tone of voice indicated by a word on a card. The others then had to guess what that word was. “Pubic hair!” one yelled (the correct answer was “drill sergeant”). “Vaginal fluid,” whispered another (“embarrassed”). “Rectum!” scolded a third (“annoyed”). It proved to be challenging to guess what the card said, and that was the lesson: even when you are a sex-ed teacher, communication of feelings about sex ed is very difficult.

Having warmed up their audience, Pedisich and Vernacchio issued a series of tricky relationship conundrums written on index cards. “You and your partner have very similar genders,” one began. “It’s one of the things you first bonded over, and has continued to be a really important part of your relationship. Neither of you has had or wanted to have surgery, but you recently realized it’s something you want to pursue.”

“You were assigned female at birth and identify as trans, and your partner is a cis female,” read another. (“Cis female” means a woman who was declared female at birth and is fine with that.) “Your partner’s dyke identity is really important to her, and she is uncomfortable with being seen as straight and has outed you on occasion because of it.”

Over lunch, Dr. Ruth Westheimer, the famous sex therapist and former sniper for the Haganah—four feet seven inches tall, eighty-six years old, in a bubble-gum-pink blazer—held forth from a step stool. She told about the time she was on “Letterman” and talked about a man who said that his partner liked putting onion rings on his penis, and Letterman walked right off the set. Then there was the time Diane Sawyer interviewed her and her husband, and Sawyer asked her husband how their sex life was, and he said sadly, “The shoe-

maker’s children don’t have any shoes.”

Late in the afternoon, there was a session on sexual myths, led by Brian Flaherty, a legal reference librarian, and Megara Bell, who teaches sex ed to kids with Asperger’s syndrome. Some sexual myths, they had discovered, were at least partly extinct. The one about green M&M’s making you horny, for instance—while that one was well known to old white people from Boston, it had been met with incomprehension by young nonwhite people from the Bronx.

Flaherty and Bell had put together experiments to dispel mistaken information. For instance, vodka tampons: there was a rumor that you could get



drunk and avoid alcohol breath by soaking a tampon in vodka and inserting it. A quick fact check proved that getting drunk by this method would require a frightening number of tampons, not to mention tolerance of considerable discomfort. “It burns like crazy,” Bell said. “I mean—for science.” Vodka enemas, she conceded, were quite effective (this fact was not demonstrated), although they could kill you.

Yet another rumor they had encountered: that you couldn’t use a silicon-based lubricant on a latex condom. Flaherty and Bell summoned five volunteers to the stage to test the suitability of various types of lubricant on latex condoms. Each volunteer blew up a condom, applied lubricant to it, and then started to rub it—friction was necessary. The Vaseline condom broke first with a loud bang, then the baby oil, then the vegetable oil. But the silicon- and the water-based Astroglide, Bell said, could last all day.

—Larissa MacFarquhar

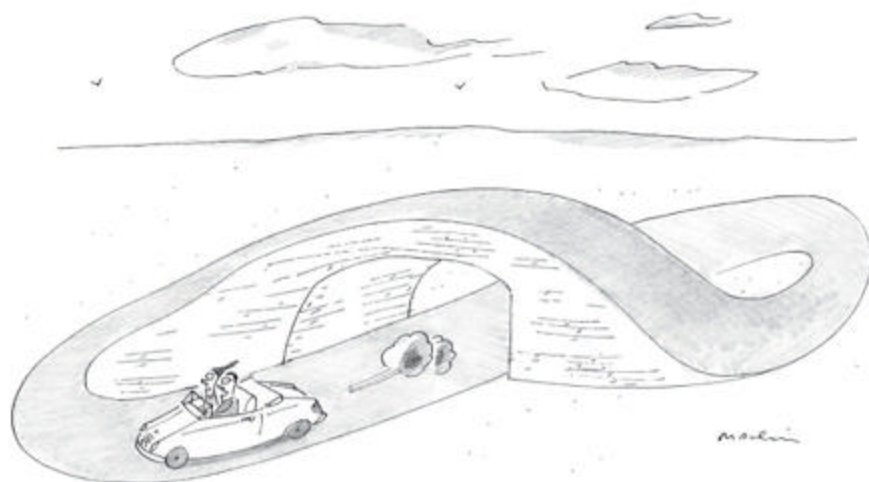


Over the past few weeks, those possessed by the Christmas spirit could be found dusting off family recipes for that holiday staple the roll-out sugar cookie. There are a lot of ways to tweak the classic formula—Melt the butter! Add a pinch of nutmeg!—but, in one unlikely San Francisco test kitchen, cookie disruption has been taken to a new level.

Up a flight of stairs at 2169 Mission Street (which a red sign identifies as “Noisebridge: A Hacker Spaceship”) is a fifty-two-hundred-square-foot loft where members of the hacker community tinker with hardware and software, hoping to stumble upon that next thing or string of code we didn’t know we couldn’t live without. Its communal kitchen has a youth-hostel vibe. In the fridge, one recent afternoon, there was a box of baking soda, a Tupperware of stir-fry dregs, a mound of damp paper towels, and a sign, affixed to nothing, that read, “Plz Dont Take.”

“When we were starting the company, they’d have free food once or twice a week,” Nemil Dalal, a skinny tech entrepreneur, said. Dalal, who described his age as “just north of thirty,” is the co-creator of CookieCaster, a Web service that allows people to design custom cookie cutters on their computers and then have them fabricated on a 3-D printer. “Unleash your creativity,” the company’s Web site exhorts; with CookieCaster, you can either draw your cookie-cutter shape or “magic trace” the outline of an uploaded image (a photograph of your dachshund, say, or the Yankees’ logo). A gallery of user designs on cookiecaster.com includes a medley of relatively uncreative holiday shapes (candy cane, dreidel, snowman), a skull and crossbones, the Nike swoosh, a hammer and sickle, and the state of Louisiana. Someone even made a cookie cutter in the shape of Pharrell’s hat.

“I baked a ton when I was in high school. Then, when I went to college, not so much,” Dalal said, sipping mint tea. He is from suburban New Jersey,



“Until there’s a reason not to trust the G.P.S., I’m trusting the G.P.S.”

where his dad worked at Bell Labs. He studied electrical engineering at Stanford, and returned there for business school. Dalal saw his first 3-D printer at Noisebridge, in 2011. “This was the first one I built,” he said, gesturing toward what appeared to be an Erector Set—plastic cogs, colorful wires, and metal rods. The parts cost around six hundred and fifty dollars.

He explained that it took him and his college roommate about five weeks to develop and code CookieCaster, in 2012. Now several thousand people use the service each month; the numbers doubled as the holidays approached. “We let them download it for free. Because, for us, it was really just a proof of concept—do people want to design?” he said. Eventually, he expects that users will move from cookies to toys: building blocks and custom Warcraft and Minecraft figurines. “All of this really complex 3-D software, it’s made for professionals. For a neophyte, it’s difficult. I always thought, I want my parents to be able to use it.” His mother, who is a painter, has designed an Om-symbol cutter.

Dalal and his partner created CookieCaster at Noisebridge and in a garage around the corner. Now his company, Dreamforge, has an office nearby, with five employees. They’ve expanded into offering jewelry and “indie artist”-designed cell-phone cases.

A few other guys without day jobs were hanging around Noisebridge, which was co-founded by a hacker named Mitch Altman, who invented a remote

control that can turn off other people’s TVs. A former Google employee took a break from building a book scanner to show off his app, which he described as “Uber for pizza.” Chirping could be heard from a tank of crickets, kept as food for the communal pet, Lizard of Oz. A poster explained the local form of governance, Do-Ocracy: “If you want something done DO IT but remember to be excellent to each other when doing so.”

Dalal pulled up cookiecaster.com, whose home page features a bucolic cartoon scene, with rainbow-sprinkled clouds and a hot-pink gingerbread man in a bow tie. “When we launched, it looked really, really ugly,” he said. On Dribbble, a site that showcases designers, he found Mathieu Jouhet, a floppy-haired freelancer who lives in Paris. Jouhet chimed in, over speakerphone, that he’s a sugar-cookie man. “I am a huge fan of your American cookies, but we do not have the same measurement system in France, so it’s really hard to get a good recipe.”

They talked demographics. “I didn’t realize how excited the Germans were about cookies,” Dalal said. “Then there are the gaming people, who create cookie cutters of their avatars.”

“Yes, I think geeks are our main target, because they like to create stuff,” Jouhet agreed. “They just like to be geeks, you know?”

“But a lot of the people who want to make cookie cutters, they don’t care about 3-D printing,” Dalal said. “They just do it because they want the cookie.”

—Emma Allen

THE VIROLOGIST

How a young entrepreneur built an empire by repackaging memes.

BY ANDREW MARANTZ



One afternoon in June, Emerson Spartz, an Internet-media entrepreneur in Chicago, left his office and walked several blocks to the Museum of Contemporary Art, where he was scheduled to speak at an event called the Millennial Impact Conference. He and other participants had been asked to discuss ways that young people using technology can “build movements to create change.” This is not Spartz’s specialty. “I basically have only one speech,” he told me. “It’s about how to make things go viral. I have personal preferences about how I would want those principles to be applied, but in practice they can be used for pretty much anything.”

Spartz is twenty-seven and has been successfully launching Web sites for more than half his life. In Chicago’s small startup subculture, he is an envied figure. On his way to the conference, he ran into Jimmy Odom, a thirty-three-year-old businessman with dreadlocks. Odom described Spartz to me as “inspiring” and “legitimately awesome.”

“Why won’t you accept my friend request?” Odom asked him.

Spartz grinned apologetically and said, “Facebook puts a cap on how many friends you can have”—five thousand—“and I’m at the limit.”

In 1999, when Spartz was twelve, he built MuggleNet, which became the

most popular Harry Potter fan site in the world. He appeared on CNN and Fox News, and J. K. Rowling invited him to her estate in Scotland. He eventually lost interest in Rowling—although he bought “The Casual Vacancy,” her recent novel for adults, he said he hadn’t yet read it—but he remained fixated on commanding young people’s attention online. “As I became less motivated by my passion for the books, I got obsessed with the entrepreneurial side of it, the game of maximizing patterns and seeing how big my reach could get,” he said.

Web development is a low-overhead enterprise, especially when you live with your parents. MuggleNet made hundreds of thousands of dollars through advertising, and Spartz funnelled his earnings into a new company: Spartz, Inc. His first employee was his younger brother Dylan, who designed the site; during college, at Notre Dame, Emerson started working with Gaby Montero, then his girlfriend and now his wife. After graduation, they started building rudimentary Web sites, sometimes as many as one a month: GivesMeHope (“Chicken Soup for the Soul”—the twenty-first-century, Twitter-style version); Memestache (“All the Funny Memes”); OMG Facts (“The World’s #1 Fact Source”). Many of the sites fizzled out; others gained a following. When Internet culture developed a fascination with “fails”—news bloopers, errant autocorrects—Spartz created a site where users could post funny mistakes from Facebook (Unfriendable), a site featuring gaffes from television (As Failed On TV), and one about garbled text messages (SmartphOWNED). When the data indicated that optimism was attracting more visitors than Schadenfreude, Spartz let his “fail” sites languish and focussed on promoting GivesMeHope, a repository for anonymous, uplifting anecdotes.

Last year, Spartz, Inc., raised eight million dollars in venture-capital funding and made several million more in advertising revenue. As new-media companies like BuzzFeed and Upworthy become established brands, Spartz hopes to disrupt the disrupters. He employs three dozen people full time, in addition to several freelancers. The company operates thirty sites, which have no unifying aesthetic. Their home pages,

Emerson Spartz calls himself an aggregator, but he acts more like a day trader.

which can be chaotic and full of old links, don't always feature a Spartz logo; traffic is generated almost entirely through Facebook, so brand recognition is relatively unimportant. Most of the company's innovations concern not the content itself but how it is promoted and packaged: placing unusually large share buttons at the top and the bottom of posts; experimenting with which headlines and photographs would be more seductive; devising strategies for making posts show up prominently in Facebook's news feed. "I keep hearing people around town talking about this young man as a Steve Jobs kind of guy," Gary Holdren, one of Spartz's chief investors, told me. "I think his stuff is indicative of where digital media is headed."

At the museum, Spartz waited backstage while Jake Brewer—a manager at Change.org, a platform for petitions—delivered a speech about online organizing. Brewer, who is thirty-four, warned that online activists needed to be more strategic. "The Internet has created a huge megaphone," he said. "That's great, but it often creates so much noise that the people on the receiving end can't hear anything."

Spartz took the stage, wearing a cordless microphone. People who achieve success at an early age often retain a childlike aspect into adulthood, and Spartz has the saucer eyes and cuspidated chin of a cartoon fawn. His hair style (a tidy mop top) and clothing preferences (heathered T-shirt, dark jeans, black sneakers) have not changed much since his tween years. A screen in front of a velvet curtain displayed, in jaunty type, "Hi! I'm Emerson Spartz. I want to change the world."

When he was growing up, Spartz said, his parents made him read "four short biographies of successful people every single day. Imagine for a second what happens to your brain when you're twelve and this is how you're spending your time." He used his hands to pantomime his mind being blown. "I realized that influence was inextricably linked to impact—the more influence you had, the more impact you could create. . . . The ability to make things go viral felt like the closest that we could get to having a human superpower."

He offered practical tips: "Facebook should be eighty per cent of your effort,

if you're focussed on social media"; "Try to change every comma to a period"; "Use lists whenever possible. Lists just hijack the brain's neural circuitry." Behind me, two women in their fifties took notes on legal pads. In summary, Spartz said, "The more awesome you are, the more emotion you create, the more viral it is." One of the women whispered, "Really impressive."

Spartz left the stage and walked to his office, a mile away, without stopping to see the Isa Genzken retrospective upstairs. "People have hoity-toity reasons for preferring one kind of entertainment to another," he said later. "To me, it doesn't matter whether you're looking at cat photos that inspire you or so-called 'high art' that inspires you."

I had met Spartz a few weeks earlier, at a dinner during a tech-industry conference in Manhattan. When I asked him what he did for a living, he replied, "I'm passionate about virality." I must have looked confused, because he said, "Let me bring that down from the thirty-thousand-foot level." The appetizer course had not yet arrived. He checked the time on his cell phone and cleared his throat. "Every day, when I was a kid, my parents made me read four short biographies of very successful people," he began.

On this occasion, I was the only person listening to his speech, but he spoke in a distant and deliberate tone, using studied pauses and facial expressions, as if I were a video camera's lens. When he got to the part about virality being a superpower—"I realized that if you could make ideas go viral, you could tip elections, start movements, revolutionize industries"—I asked whether that was really true.


"Can you rephrase your question in a more concrete way?" he said.


I mentioned "Kony 2012," a thirty-minute film about the Ugandan militia leader Joseph Kony. It has been viewed on YouTube more than a hundred million times, but it did not achieve its ultimate goal: Kony remains at large, as does his militia, the Lord's Resistance Army.


"To be honest, I didn't follow too closely after the whole thing died down," Spartz said. "Even though I'm one of the most avid readers I know, I don't usually


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read straight news. It's conveyed in a very boring way, and you tend to see the same patterns repeated again and again."

He went on, "If I were running a more hard-news-oriented media company and I wanted to inform people about Uganda, first, I would look it up and find out exactly what's going on there. Then I would find a few really poignant images or story lines, ones that create a lot of resonant emotion, and I would make those into a short video—under three minutes—with clear, simple words and statistics. Short, declarative sentences. And at the end I'd give people something they can do, something to feel hopeful about."

Spartz left before dessert, which he called "a low return on investment, calorically." On his way out, he sent me an e-mail as an aide-mémoire. The subject line read, "Hi. Stay in touch!" and the entire text of the e-mail was "Viral guy."

The offices of Spartz, Inc., are in a loft space with polished-cement floors, bright-red walls, a hammock, and an aquarium full of sea monkeys. Games are everywhere—Xbox, Blokus, Ping-Pong—but I never saw anyone playing them. Spartz and his staffers sit in one room, at undivided workstations. On a wooden support beam near his desk, Spartz has tacked up images of some of his idols: Jobs, Branson, Bezos. The office layout is ostensibly non-hierarchical, but the workstation next to Spartz belongs to Matt Thacker, the chief financial officer, who has an M.B.A. and describes himself as the company's oldest employee "by a hundred years." He is thirty-six. A few seats away sits Gaby Spartz, the company's vice-president of content. (Dylan Spartz recently left the company to join a startup in Los Angeles.) Other workstations are for data scientists, Web developers, and five "associate editors," who write the material on Spartz's sites.

Employees communicate with one another through instant messages. They almost never talk out loud, and there are no office phones. When something must be discussed face-to-face, staffers arrange to meet in one of several conference rooms ringing the central space. These are named for regions of Westeros, the

fictional territory depicted in "Game of Thrones." Because the decision to continue a conversation off-line is made online, a visitor will occasionally notice several people standing up in unison, unplugging their laptops, and carrying them silently toward King's Landing or Casterly Rock.

On the day I arrived, the company was in the process of reconceiving its flagship site. In the morning, it was named Brainwreck.com ("The #2 Most Addicting Site"); by the afternoon, it had been re-branded as Dose.com ("Your Daily Dose of Amazing"). The new design, Spartz explained, had a more "premium" feel, with cleaner lines and more muted colors. If the name Brainwreck invoked self-destructiveness, Dose was ambiguous—suggesting either a dose of Vicodin or a dose of vitamins—and this allowed for more tonal flexibility. Few people would take seriously a site called Brainwreck Politics or Brainwreck Travel, but Dose could in theory expand in almost any direction.

For now, Dose is a simple photo- and video-aggregation site. Around the office, posts on Dose are called "lists," and one hears comments like "The list about albino animals is crushing it right now." The posts are collections of images arranged to tell a story ("This Dad Decided to Embarrass His Son in the Most Elaborate Way Possible. LOL"), make an argument ("Bacon-Wrapped Onion Rings Are Perfect for Appetizers, Burgers, and Life"), or offer variations on a theme ("The 21 Most Unusual Horses That Make Even Unicorns Seem Basic"). A bored teen-ager absent-mindedly clicking links will eventually end up on a site like Dose. Spartz's goal is to make the site so "sticky"—attention-grabbing and easy to navigate—that the teen-ager

will stay for a while. Money is generated through ads—sometimes there are as many as ten on a page—and Spartz hopes to develop traffic-boosting software that he can sell to publishers and advertisers.

Most of Spartz's old sites are still online, but, because their content is user generated, they run largely on autopilot. The company now devotes much of its attention to promoting Dose, which in

November received thirty-three million page views. (In aggregate, Spartz says, the company's sites attract sixty million page views a month.) When I was at the office, Spartz's engineers were also building two smartphone apps: Blanks, a mobile version of the party game Cards Against Humanity; and Twirl, a gay version of the dating app Tinder. Spartz thinks that pathbreaking ideas are overvalued. "If you want to build a successful virus, you can start by trying to engineer the DNA from scratch—or, much more efficient, you take a virus that you already know is potent, mutate it a tiny bit, and expose it to a new cluster of people." Brainwreck's early posts "leaned more toward originality," Spartz said—they featured novel combinations of images, with text that reflected at least a few minutes of online research—but with Dose "we've stopped doing that as much because more original lists take more time to put together, and we've found that people are no more likely to click on them."

Whenever I glanced at Spartz's screen, he was almost always studying one of several data-analytics programs, which break down his sites' traffic into dozens of metrics. He commissions even more detailed reports from his data scientists, in an effort to predict visitors' clicking habits at a pixel-by-pixel level of specificity. "Analytics is so baked into everything we do that I can't even imagine having a separate discussion about it," he said. Spartz is unusually candid about how dependent he is on social media. "Our volume of traffic right now is possible only because Facebook has been very generous about linking to our content," he said. "I'm aware that they might not be so generous forever."

Much of the company's success online can be attributed to a proprietary algorithm that it has developed for "headline testing"—a practice that has become standard in the virality industry. When a Dose post is created, it initially appears under as many as two dozen different headlines, distributed at random. Whereas one person's Facebook news feed shows a link to "You Won't Believe What This Guy Did with an Abandoned Factory," another person, two feet away, might see "At First It Looks Like an Old Empty Factory. But Go Inside and . . . WHOA." Spartz's



algorithm measures which headline is attracting clicks most quickly, and after a few hours, when a statistically significant threshold is reached, the “winning” headline automatically supplants all others. “I’m really, really good at writing headlines,” he told me. “But any human’s intuition can only be so good. If you can build a machine that can solve the problem better than you can, then you really understand the problem.”

At the bottom of a Dose post, there is usually a small “hat tip” (abbreviated as “H/T”). Many people don’t notice this citation, if they even reach the bottom of the post. On Dose’s first day of existence, its most successful list was called “23 Photos of People from All Over the World Next to How Much Food They Eat Per Day.” It was a clever illustration of global diversity and inequity: an American truck driver holding a tray of cheeseburgers and Starbucks Frappuccinos; a Maasai woman posing with eight hundred calories’ worth of milk and porridge. Beneath the final photograph, a line of tiny gray text read “H/T Elite Daily.” It linked to a post that Elite Daily, a Web site based in New York, had published a month earlier (“See the Incredible Differences in the Daily Food Intake of People Around the World”). That post, in turn, had linked to UrbanTimes (“80 People, 30 Countries and How Much They Eat on a Daily Basis”), which had credited Amusing Planet (“What People Eat Around the World”), which had cited a 2010 radio interview with Faith D’Aluisio and Peter Menzel, the writer and the photographer behind the project.

The Dose post, which received more Facebook shares than its precursors, briefly mentioned D’Aluisio and Menzel (though D’Aluisio’s name was misspelled). But their book, “What I Eat,” went unmentioned, and they certainly did not share in the advertising revenue. “This took us four years and almost a million dollars, all self-funded,” Menzel told me. “We are trying to make that money back by selling the book and licensing the images. But these viral sites—the gee-whiz types that are just trying to attract eyeballs—they don’t pay for licensing. They just grab stuff and hope they don’t get caught. I don’t want to make a comparison to Ebola, but I do think it’s no accident that they use the metaphor of a virus.”



“He’s his own worst enemy.”

• •

Around 4 P.M., Matt Thacker, the C.F.O., clapped me on the back and said, “Exciting day, huh?” I scanned the room of impassive faces. “It’s our biggest traffic day ever!” Thacker said. He told me that the food list had received two hundred thousand page views. By instant message, employees exchanged jubilant GIFs and emojis.

An announcement was made over office chat, and soon everyone went to the kitchen and stood in a circle. From a refrigerator, which was permanently stocked with hummus and Muscle Milk, came bottles of André sparkling wine. Spartz delivered a toast. “We spend a lot of time doing a lot of back-end things, a lot of tweaking,” he said. “This is one of those days when we get to celebrate—a new name, a relatively new site, and the biggest day Spartz has had in its history. To Dose!” He played a gong sound on his iPhone. People giggled, then dis-

banded. I turned to the man next to me, a programmer in a Cubs hat, and asked about the sound. Was it an inside joke? He laughed nervously and retreated to his desk. Later, over the phone, he explained that ringing a digital gong at meetings had become “an office meme.”

When Emerson Spartz was a child in La Porte, Indiana, he had the highest batting average on his Little League team. “I quickly started seeing patterns,” he told me. His coach instructed only the fastest players to steal bases. Spartz was not fast, but he noticed that the catchers were unpracticed at throwing to second base, allowing runners to advance. “I started stealing pretty much every time,” he said. “It worked extremely well, but that wasn’t what the coach cared about, apparently.” To punish Spartz for disobedience, the coach batted him eighth. “I gave him a

statistical explanation of why it made no sense to put your best hitter at the bottom of the order," Spartz said. "You can imagine how that went over."

At school, he was a precocious student who chafed at classroom structure. A few weeks into seventh grade, he asked his parents if he could be homeschooled. His mother, Maggi, was the breadwinner, working at a local philanthropic foundation. His father, Tom, became Emerson's teacher.

One Sunday, I drove Emerson and Gaby from Chicago to La Porte, where his parents still live. We headed east on Interstate 90 for just over an hour, passed a few cornfields, and pulled into a driveway. Maggi and Tom were waiting in the front yard with Emerson's youngest brother, Drew, who is sixteen. Tom Spartz speaks in passionate bursts that sound like unrelated fortune-cookie aphorisms spliced together. He said, of his role in Emerson's intellectual growth, "I don't care what expectations you have, all of the great—we'll call them 'developers'—were just continually shaking with energy. You want to keep 'em moving, keep 'em loose, keep 'em testing. I saw this stuff coming long ago. When you see the momentum, you'll be laughing at how obvious it all was." Tom calls himself "a part-time inventor and business developer," though none of his inventions have become solvent companies. In the non-digital world, it is harder to convert industriousness into income.

A few days after Emerson dropped out of school, Dylan joined him. Tom showed me the den, which he had used as the boys' classroom, with desks, whiteboards, and inspirational posters. ("Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.") Drew attended a public high school—"He's more of a rule follower," Tom said—and the den was now just a den. On a weight-lifting bench, Tom had arranged a two-foot stack of the "short biographies of successful people" that I had heard about from Emerson. They turned out to be extremely short: a single-sided page each, photocopied from a newspaper called *Investor's Business Daily*. Each distilled a life of accomplishment into a moral. (Karl Malone: "Practice makes perfect." Mel Blanc: "Never give up.") Tom shuffled through the pile and picked out a page

UNDER THE STAIRS

Houseroom for things you forget or try to imagine:
a saw, two planks of plywood, a jam jar of nails,
the shredded fibres of a doormat returning to hair,
a coal scuttle, pair of breathless bellows—
implements in their places, for love, for sorrow—
and something immeasurably near, nudging the hardware.

It's where you put things, see? Out of sight, on hold.
They wait, unredeemed, unclaimed, for decades or more
where a windless chronic air lags and corrodes.
Is it in there, still? That ancient, reflex scare,
a dream of hiding, trapped under infinite stairs,
bolthole for never quite knowing no one's there

except oneself, fooled in childhood fears—
unless, even so (yird-hunger rooting for the cold
where last we found them, stored among signs and wonders,
holed among rusty tools, wincy spiders . . .)
somehow we'd know, in that indoor earthy closeness,
a sudden beauty: their answering, lonely faces.

Childhood's pit of dares, daredevil's den,
cache of keeps and losses, teases, thrills—
a creep of outdoor damp in the flaking walls,
a broken concrete floor caking to soil.
Open the door a crack and you smell it still,
below-stairs air, too near, too close to home.

—Angela Leighton

about the novelist Pearl S. Buck. "It shows that she was away from her normal world, and all of a sudden she's writing about the East," he said. "It's like, Wow, can you imagine?"

I asked Tom if he had encouraged the boys to read Buck's novels. He shook his head. "You lay out a hook, but you don't put it in the fish's mouth," he said. Apart from the biographies and enough algebra to satisfy state requirements, the Spartz pedagogy was flexible and self-directed. The boys listened to motivational audiobooks by Tony Robbins and watched documentaries by Ken Burns. They learned arithmetic in part through "Kroger math"—on trips to the supermarket, Emerson and Dylan kept a tally of prices while Tom added items to the cart.

In 1999, Emerson discovered Homestead, one of the first free applications that allowed users to design Web pages without learning how to code. He built

a site called Xtreme Golf—"Xtreme' with an 'X,' which I thought was incredibly cool"—and then www.the-best-harrypotter-links.homestead.com, which evolved into MuggleNet. When he reached the limit of what he could do with Homestead, he began to learn HTML. Web production became his main school project and his job.

At the same time, Gaby Montero was building Web sites dedicated to the subculture of *kawaii*, the Japanese word for cute. She grew up in Quito, Ecuador, and studied at an international school; now twenty-seven, she is petite and pale, and it is easy to imagine her as an indoor kid. "My parents wanted me to hang out with more people after school," she said. "I would just be on the computer with my Internet friends."

Gaby and Emerson met during their first year at Notre Dame, where they were both business majors. They knew more about Web development than most

of their professors did, and they kept coming up with ideas for viral sites. Soon after graduation, in 2009, they married, moved into an apartment in South Bend, and built GivesMeHope, which quickly became profitable.

During lunch with the family, I asked Tom when he realized that Gaby would be able to match Emerson intellectually. “She can’t,” he said. “That’s one of those things—when you’re a thoroughbred and your goal is to get further and further and you don’t even look back, it’s over.” Emerson is a quick thinker with impressive recall, as is Gaby; I never saw him introduce a concept that she didn’t immediately grasp. I thought that Tom might be joking, but nobody laughed and Gaby did not visibly react. (“I wasn’t surprised to hear him say that,” she told me later. “Before we met, Emerson was a pretty serious guy—staying inside all day, sucking up information.” Because she is the “more chatty, more sociable” of the two, she said, people sometimes think of her as being less book-smart.)

On the drive back to Chicago, Emerson discussed artificial intelligence. “We’ll soon get to a point where A.I. fully surpasses us,” he said. “When you think about what asymptotic growth looks like, there’s no way humans are going to be able to keep up.” I interrupted him to ask whether we should stay on the highway or merge into the exit lane. He hesitated briefly.

“We could just Google it,” Gaby said from the back seat.

“No, Gaby, I know exactly where we are,” he said. He told me not to turn.

A Katy Perry song was playing on the radio. “Art is that which science has not yet explained,” he said. “Imagine that the vocals are mediocre in an otherwise amazing song. What if you could have forty people record different vocals, and then test it by asking thousands of people, ‘Which one is best?’ To me, that’s a trickle in an ocean of possible ways you could improve every song on the radio.”

Several times, I asked Spartz if I could talk to his content producers. He discouraged me, first subtly and then explicitly. “They don’t have as much personal discretion as you might think,” he said. “What we do is pretty algorithmic.”

Spartz calls himself an aggregator, but he is more like a day trader, invest-

ing in pieces of content that seem poised to go viral. He and his engineers have developed algorithms that scan the Internet for memes with momentum. The content team then acts as arbitrageurs, cosmetically altering the source material and reposting it under what they hope will be a catchier headline. A meme’s success on Imgur, Topsy, or “certain niche subreddits” might indicate a potential viral hit. He added, “The sources and the rules sound simple, but it takes a lot of experimentation to make it actually useful. It’s a lot of indicators weighed against each other, and they’re always changing.” If an image is popular on Reddit but relatively stagnant on Pinterest, for example, Spartz’s algorithm might pass it up in favor of something more likely to appeal to Dose’s audience.

Eventually, Spartz gave me permission to talk to Chelsea DeBaise, one of the content producers. DeBaise, who is

twenty-two, wore a crew-neck T-shirt and a baseball cap advertising a brand of vodka. She had posted several lists that morning. (Recent headlines included “33 Photos of People Taken Seconds Before They Die. #10 Is from My Nightmares” and “No Matter How Much You Stare, You Won’t Be Able to Guess What These Photos Really Are Of.”) She had just graduated from Syracuse University, where she majored in writing and contributed to the *Daily Orange*. Her best story, she said, was a feature about local poverty, for which she spent several days talking to homeless people. “Stories like that—heavily reported, with one-on-one interviews—there is a lot of value in that,” she said. “But then you have to think about impact. A Dose story I did in an hour would shatter that one, in terms of reach.”

After college, DeBaise applied mostly to tech startups. “I was willing to sort of

PINOCCHIO'S SECOND REALIZATION



put my journalism practice on the back burner," she said. "But since I've come here I've found that a lot of those skills—attention to detail, an affinity for research—have come into play. I was surprised, in a pleasant way." When she writes Dose headlines, she said, "there is a part of Syracuse University Chelsea that's, like, 'I don't know if this is the way I should write it.'" The headlines that "win," according to Spartz's testing algorithm, are usually hyperbolic, and many of them begin with dangling participles or end with prepositions. "But then another part of me is, like, 'Actually, there's pretty definitive evidence that this version will get a better response.' So is the goal for people to look at it and be, like, 'Wow, that girl wrote a really articulate headline'? At some point, you have to check your ego."

When we spoke, DeBaise was reading "In Persuasion Nation," a book of dystopian short stories by George Saunders, in which the oppressive force is not a totalitarian government but the all-seeing eye of targeted advertising. One story, "My Flamboyant Grandson," takes place in midtown Manhattan, in the not so distant future. As the narrator and his grandson walk the streets, devices implanted in the sidewalk mine digital information from strips in their shoes. Eye-level screens then show them "images reflective of the Personal Preferences we'd stated," imploring them, for example, to visit a nearby Burger King.

DeBaise said, "You know the quote from 'Spider-Man'—'With great power comes great responsibility'? Well, a tremendous amount of media attention means a lot of power. We're lucky that Emerson is inherently a good person, because if you had someone that smart who *wasn't*? Lord knows what would happen."

In March, a working group at the *Times* presented an internal report to the paper's top editors. A few weeks later, the report was leaked, and BuzzFeed published it. The first sentence was "The New York *Times* is winning at journalism." However, it warned, "we are falling behind in a second critical area: the art and science of getting our journalism to readers." Virality, in other words. The report's authors argued that shar-

ing and promotion should not be seen as a "chore"; on the contrary, "watching a year-old story go viral on social" could be "truly exciting."

Old-media loyalists were troubled by some of the report's recommendations. The metaphorical "wall" separating editorial staff and business staff, long considered an axiom of journalistic ethics, was cautiously called into question. Yet traditionalists might not have recognized how good they had it. The report repeatedly distinguished the *Times*' core mission—"winning at journalism"—from more easily quantifiable goals, such as winning at page views. In our data-obsessed moment, it is subversive to assert that the value of a product is not reducible to its salability.

When I e-mailed Spartz to ask about the report, he said that he hadn't heard of it. After skimming it, he wrote that it seemed like too little too late: "Nothing struck me as being particularly eye-opening, just confirmed my suspicions about how far they are behind the . . . *Times*. (Sorry.)"

The report acknowledged a "tension between quality control and expanded digital capabilities." Spartz experiences no such tension, because he does not distinguish between quality and virality. He uses "effective," "successful," and "good" interchangeably. At one point, he told me, "The way we view the world, the ultimate barometer of quality is: if it gets shared, it's quality. If someone wants to toil in obscurity, if that makes them happy, that's fine. Not everybody has to change the world."

Spartz does not call what he makes journalism, even if he employs a few journalists, and he does not erect barriers between his product and his means of promoting it. Asked to name the most beautiful prose he had read, he said, "A beautiful book? I don't even know what that means. Impactful, sure."

Neetzan Zimmerman, formerly the chief aggregator of viral content at Gawker, is the editor of a secret-sharing app called Whisper. He told me that Spartz's approach seemed most indebted to Upworthy, which became famous for tantalizing viewers with headlines containing such phrases as "You Won't Believe What Happened Next." "If you consider Upworthy to be the starting

point for a genre of site that trades in the curiosity gap, then I think Dose and sites like it are the logical conclusion of that trend," Zimmerman said. "Upworthy at least goes through the process of finding the content themselves. On Dose, you see entire lists that are ripped wholesale from other Web sites and passed off as their work. I think there is a cynicism to that." He added, "But that's an abstract conversation—it doesn't make what they're doing any less effective as a business."

Kathleen Sweeney, who teaches courses about viral media at the New School, told me, "There's a difference between 'I want to change the world' and 'I want to change the world, and along the way I want to make millions of dollars.' You can start off with one mission, but then you start to notice, 'We get way more traffic when we put up cat videos, and your mission shifts.'"

Spartz never had to shift in the first place. "We considered making Dose more mission-driven," he said. "Then I thought, rather than facing that dilemma every day—what's going to get views versus what's going to create positive social impact?—it would be simpler to just focus on traffic." He sometimes phrases this sentiment in the snappy style of Dose headlines: "You can have whatever personal values you want, but businesses that don't provide what the customers want don't remain businesses. Literally, never."

Earlier, in Casterly Rock, Spartz and I had spoken about targeted advertising. "The future of media is an ever-increasing degree of personalization," he said. "My CNN won't look like your CNN. So we want Dose, eventually, to be tailored to each user. You shouldn't have to choose what you want, because we will be able to get enough data to know what you want better than you do."

On a whiteboard behind him were the phrases "old media," "Tribune," and "\$100 M." "The lines between advertising and content are blurring," he said. "Right now, if you go to any Web site, it will know where you live, your shopping history, and it will use that to give you the best ad. I can't wait to start doing that with content. It could take a few months, a few years—but I am motivated to get started on it right now, because I know I'll kill it." ♦

STING IS ME

BY CORA FRAZIER

In one of the boldest gambles in many a theater season, Sting will begin acting in the Broadway musical “The Last Ship” . . . in hopes that his devoted fans will help turn around the show’s previously low ticket sales. . . . Sting is replacing the actor Jimmy Nail.

—*The Times*.

Attention, patrons: For the remainder of the performances of “Cora’s Life,” the role of Cora will be played by Sting.

Audiences will delight in seeing the international music superstar Sting as Cora, unsure about how undressed to get at the doctor’s office and overestimating by several garments.

Producers fully expect Sting, one of the most talented living humans, to give the production new verve. When our story opens, Sting is wearing a sample bridesmaid’s dress, looking in a store mirror and trying to picture the dress in a different size, color, and style.

Theatregoers will witness a flashback scene in which Sting, who was also cast as the younger Cora, tells her four-year-old cousin at a sleepover that her doll got bit by a rat and had to wear a full body cast.

As in previous performances, Sting’s Cora will think extensively, and seek advice from friends, therapists, acquaintances, and gym employees, about the meaning of an e-mail from LinkedIn informing her that her ex-boyfriend wants to “connect.”

The rest of the cast remains the same, including the man in the truck who calls out to Sting as she is running in her oversized shorts, prompting Sting to yell, “C’mon, dude! Didn’t you see the catcalling video?”

In upcoming performances of “Co-

ra’s Life,” Sting makes the significant choice to wear her hair two inches shorter and slightly less layered.

Spoiler alert: At some point in the show, Sting lies on her bed in a fetal position and starts crying within the first ten seconds of the trailer for “Beyond the Lights.”

In a pivotal scene, Sting’s Cora considers whether she is bold enough to



wear a crop top—wondering if this represents female empowerment or objectification—texts her friends to see what they’re wearing, reads blogs about what celebrities eat before awards shows to prevent bloating, and then, ultimately, just puts on her Batman T-shirt.

Watch Sting as she tells a man on a first date, unprompted, that she would convert to Judaism.

The character Sting is portraying doesn’t look perfect in the morning—this we learn in Act II. Plus, Sting’s stomach makes noises in the morning,

because she is a human being! And Sting.

Critics privy to preview performances say that Sting redefines the Method, and bravery itself, in the scene in which Cora is in the E.R. for a ruptured ovarian cyst. “With young women, it’s usually pelvic,” the doctor says. “I love you,” Sting says, full-eyed, to her mother, as she, Sting, is wheeled away in a hospital gown and Converse for an ultrasound. Producers are confident that, with Sting as Cora, at this moment in the production audiences will understand their common humanity, and those who know one another will, without making eye contact or saying a word, begin to hold hands.

Of past performances, audiences have remarked that the title character could check her phone far fewer times in the course of the production, with no effect whatsoever on the plot. They have sided with Cora’s mother when she says that Cora would be a very poor dog owner. They have described the extended lying-in-bed and riding-the-subway-for-no-reason scenes as boring and inexplicable.

But, with Sting in the title role, producers are confident that Cora’s commentary, at a party, about Fascism in “The Grand Budapest Hotel” will seem insightful and newsworthy, instead of loud, inopportune, and logically flawed. When Sting, as Cora, attends a family holiday cookie-making event and is the only single person there, it is not odd, or deserving of psychological scrutiny and pity. Producers are sure that Cora’s desire to dance and yell lyrics onstage at a concert will seem, to audiences, fitting for her talents, and that her attempts to enter exclusive clubs by saying to the bouncer, “Let me get your name,” will seem perfectly sensible, given the level of celebrity of the actor playing her.

Critics have said that this casting change should have been made long ago. Producers don’t disagree. The original person playing Cora is happy for this replacement to be more or less permanent. ♦

LEVIATHAN

Ways to have fun at the beach.

BY DAVID SEDARIS



As I grow older, I find that the people I know become crazy in one of two ways. The first is animal crazy—more specifically, dog crazy. They’re the ones who, when asked if they have children, are likely to answer, “A black Lab and a sheltie-beagle mix named Tuckahoe.” Then they add—they always add—“They were rescues!”

The second way people go crazy is with their diet. My brother, Paul, for instance, has all but given up solid food, and at age forty-six eats much the way he did when he was nine months old. His nickname used to be the Rooster. Now we call him the Juicester. Everything goes into his Omega J8006: kale, carrots, celery, some kind of powder scraped off the knuckles of bees, and it

all comes out dung-colored, and the texture of applesauce. He’s also taken to hanging upside down with a neti pot in his nose. “It’s for my sinuses,” he claims.

Then there’s all his disease prevention, the things that supposedly stave it off but that the drug companies don’t want you knowing about. I’ve heard this sort of thing from a number of people over the years. “Cancer can *definitely* be cured with a vegan diet,” a friend will insist, “only *they* want to keep it a secret.” In this case, the “they” that doesn’t want you to know is the meat industry, or Big Meat.

“If a vegan diet truly did cure cancer, don’t you think it would have at least made the front page of the *New York Times* Science section?” I ask. “Isn’t that

a paper’s job, to tell you the things ‘they’ don’t want you to know?”

Paul insists that apricot seeds prevent cancer but the cancer industry—Big Cancer—wants to suppress this information, and has quietly imprisoned those who have tried to enlighten us. He orders in bulk, and brought a jarful to our house at the beach, the Sea Section, in late May of last year. They’re horribly bitter, these things, and leave a definite aftertaste. “Jesus, that’s rough,” my father said, after mistaking one for an almond. “How many do you have in a day?”

Paul said four; any more could be dangerous, since they have cyanide in them. Then he juiced what I think was a tennis ball mixed with beets and four-leaf clovers.

“Add some strawberries, and I’ll have a glass as well,” my sister Lisa said. She’s not convinced about the cancer prevention, but is intrigued by all the weight our brother has lost. When he got married, in 2001, he was close to two hundred pounds—which is a lot if you’re only five feet two. Now he was down to one-thirty-five. It’s odd seeing him thin again after all these years. I expected him to look the way he did when he was twenty, before he ballooned up, and, while he’s the same physical size as he was back then, his face has aged, and he now looks like that kid’s father. It’s as if a generation of him went missing.

Part of Paul’s weight loss can be attributed to his new liquid diet, but I think that exercise has more to do with it. He bought a complicated racing bike, and rides it while wearing what looks like a Spider-Man costume and the type of cycling shoes that have cleats on them. One day that May, as I walked to the post office, he pedaled past without recognizing me. His face was unguarded, and I felt I was seeing him the way other people do, at least superficially: this boyish little man with a stalactite of snot hanging off his nose. “Mornin’,” he sang as he sped by.

It’s ridiculous how often you have to say hello on Emerald Isle. Passing someone on the street is one thing, but you have to do it in stores as well, not just to the employees who greet you at the door but to your fellow-shoppers in aisle three. Most of the houses that face the ocean are rented out during the high season, and, from week to week, the people in

them come from all over the United States. Houses near the sound are more commonly owner-occupied. They have landscaped yards, and many are fronted by novelty mailboxes. Some are shaped like fish, while others are outfitted in cozies that have various messages—"Bless Your Heart" or "Sandy Feet Welcome!"—printed on them.

The neighborhoods near the sound are so Southern that people will sometimes wave to you from *inside* their houses. Workmen, hammers in hand, shout hello from ladders and half-shingled roofs. I'm willing to bet that the local operating rooms are windowless and have doors that are solid wood. Otherwise, the surgeons and nurses would feel obliged to acknowledge everyone who passed down the hall, and patients could possibly die as a result.

While the sound side of the island feels like an old-fashioned neighborhood, the ocean side is more like an upscale retirement community. Look out a street-facing window on any given morning and you'd think a Centrum commercial was being filmed. All these hale, silver-haired seniors, walking or jogging or cycling past the house. Later in the day, when the heat cranks up, they purr by in golf carts, wearing visors, their noses streaked with sunblock. If you were a teen-ager, you likely wouldn't give it much thought, but to my sisters and me—people in our mid- to late fifties—it's chilling. *That'll be us in, like, eight years, we think. How can that be when only yesterday, on this very same beach, we were children?*

Of course, the alternative is worse. When my mother was the age that I am now, she couldn't walk more than ten steps without stopping to catch her breath. And stairs—forget it. In that regard, our father is her opposite. At ninety-one, the only thing wrong with him is his toes. "My doctor wants to cut one off, but I think he's overreacting," he said on the second morning of our vacation. The sun shone brightly through the floor-to-ceiling windows, and he was sitting shirtless at the kitchen table on the side of the house that Hugh and I share, wearing black spandex shorts.

The toes he presented for my inspection looked like fingers playing the piano, all of them long and bent and splayed.

"How do you fit those things into shoes?" I asked, wincing. "Wouldn't it be easier to go the Howard Hughes route and just wear tissue boxes on your feet?"

Just then, the plumber arrived to look at our broken dishwasher. Randy is huge in every way, and as we shook hands I thought of how small mine must have felt within his, like a paw almost. "So, what seems to be the problem?" he asked.

It's the oldest story in the book: Hugh calls and schedules an appointment regarding something I know nothing about. Then he leaves for God knows where and I'm left to explain what I don't understand. "I guess it's not washing the dishes right, or something?" I said.

Randy pulled a screwdriver from his tool belt and bent down toward a panel. "I'd have come sooner, but we're still catching up from the winter we had. Pipes frozen, all kinds of mess."

"Was it that cold?" I asked.

"Never seen anything like it," he said.

My father raised his coffee cup. "And they talk about global warming. Ha!"

After twenty minutes or so, Randy suggested we get a new dishwasher, a KitchenAid, if possible. "They're not that expensive, and it'll probably be cheaper than fixing this here one." I showed him to the door, and as he made his way down the stairs my father asked when I was going to have my prostate checked. "You need to get that taken care of A.S.A.P. While you're at it, you might want to get a complete physical. I mean, the works."

What does that have to do with the dishwasher? I wondered.

When Hugh returned, I passed on Randy's suggestion regarding the KitchenAid, and he nodded. "While he was here, did you ask him about the leak under the sink?"

"I didn't know I was supposed to."

"Goddammit, I told you last night—"

My father tapped me on the shoulder. "You need to call a doctor and get a checkup."

This was my second trip to our house on Emerald Isle, and the second time my entire family, or what was left of it, was assembling here. Summer was still a month away, and already the temperature was in the nineties. The humidity was high, and once you left the

beach the breeze disappeared, inviting in its dearth great squadrons of biting flies. Still, I would force myself out every afternoon. On one of my walks, I came across my brother and his daughter, Madelyn, standing on a bridge a few blocks inland from our house and dropping bread into the brackish canal. I thought they were feeding fish, but it turned out that they were throwing the food to turtles, dozens of them. Most had shells between six and eight inches long, and are what my sister Gretchen, who owns a lot of reptiles, calls sliders. Then there were the snapping turtles. The largest measured around three and a half feet from nose to tail. Part of his left front foot was missing, and he had a tumor on his head the size of my niece's fist.

"And you're giving them *bread*?" I said to Paul. It made me think of my first visit to Spokane, Washington. I was walking through the park that fronts the river and happened upon people feeding animals that resembled groundhogs.

"What are these?" I asked a man who was kneeling with his arm outstretched.

"Marmots," he told me.

"And what do they eat?"

He reached into a bag he kept at his feet. "Marshmallows."

I've subsequently seen people feed all sorts of things to the turtles in the canal on Emerald Isle: dry dog food, Cheerios, Pop-Tarts, potato chips.

"None of that is good for them," Gretchen says. Her turtles eat mainly worms and slugs. They like fruit as well, and certain vegetables. "But potato chips, no."

"What about *barbecue* potato chips?" I asked.

During the week that we spent at the beach, I'd visit the canal every afternoon, sometimes with raw hot dogs, sometimes with fish heads or chicken gizzards. The sliders would poke their heads out of the water, begging, but it was the snappers I was there for. Seeing one was like seeing a dinosaur, for isn't that what they are? Watching as they tore into their food, I'd shiver with fear and revulsion, the way I used to when watching my brother eat. On YouTube, there's a video of one biting off a finger, and of the man whose finger it used to be acting terribly surprised, the way that

people who offer sandwiches to bears, or jump security fences to pose beside tigers, ultimately are. There are other videos of snapping turtles eating rats and pigeons and frogs, all of which are still alive, their pathetic attempts at self-defense futile. It's a kind of pornography, and after sitting for twenty minutes, watching one poor animal after another being eviscerated, I erase my Internet user history, not wanting to be identified as the person who would find this sort of thing entertaining—yet clearly *being* that person.

Did it help, I wondered, that my favorite turtle was the one with the oversized tumor on his head and half of his front foot missing? Did that make me a friend of the sick and suffering, or just the kind of guy who wants both ice cream *and* whipped cream on his pie? Aren't snapping turtles terrible enough? Did I really need to super-size one with a cancerous growth?

My main reason for buying the house on Emerald Isle was that it would allow my family to spend more time together, especially now, while my father's still around. Instead, though, I was spending all my time with these turtles. Not that we didn't do anything as a group. One afternoon, we scattered my mother's ashes in the surf behind the house. Afterward, standing on the shore with the empty bag in my hands, I noticed a trawler creeping across the horizon. It was after shrimp, or some kind of fish, and hovering over it, like flies around a

garbage pail, were dozens of screaming seabirds. It made me think of my mother, and how we'd follow her even to the bathroom. "Can't I have *five minutes*?" she'd plead from behind the locked door as we jiggled the handle, relating something terribly important about tights, or a substitute teacher, or a dream one of us had had about a talking glove. My mother died in 1991, yet reaching into the bag, touching her remains, essentially throwing her away, was devastating, even after all this time.

Later, drained, we piled into the car and drove to the small town of Beaufort. There we went to a coffee shop, and fell in line behind a young man with a gun. It was tucked into a holster he wore belted around his waist, and, after he had got his order and taken a seat with two people I took to be his parents, we glared at him with what might as well have been a single eye. Even my father, who laughs appreciatively at such bumper stickers as "Don't Blame Me, I Voted for the American," draws the line at carrying a pistol into a place where lattes are being served. "What's he trying to prove?" he asked.

The guy was my height or maybe a little shorter, wearing pressed jeans. "He's obviously got a complex of some kind," my sister-in-law, Kathy, said.

"It's called being a Republican," Lisa offered.

My father frowned into his decaf. "Aw, come on, now."

I mentioned a couple of T-shirts I'd seen people wearing on the pier not far

from my turtle spot. "Invest in Heavy Metals," read one, and it pictured three bullets, labelled "Brass," "Copper," and "Lead." Another showed a pistol, above the message "When You Come for Mine, You Better Bring Yours."

"Since when is the government coming for anyone's guns in this country?" I asked. "I mean, honestly, can't any of us enter a Walmart right now and walk out with a Sidewinder missile?"

It was a nice moment, all of us on the same page. Then my father ruined it by asking when I'd last had a physical.

"Just recently," I said.

"Recently like when?"

"1987," I told him, adding, after he moaned, "You *do* know this is the fourth time today you've asked me about this, right? I mean, you're not just being ninety-one, are you?"

"No," he said. "I know what I'm saying."

"Well, can you please *stop* saying it?"

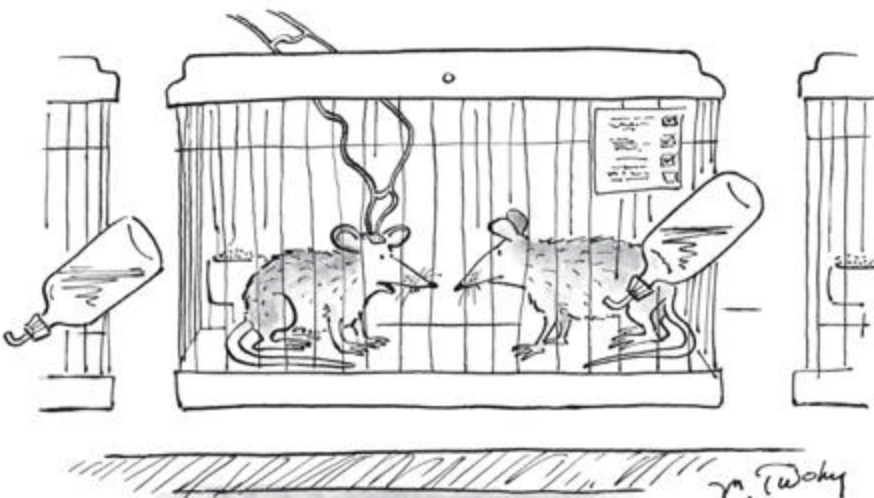
"I will when you get a physical."

"Is this really how you want to be remembered?" I asked. "As a nagger . . . with hammertoes?"

"I'm just showing my concern," he said. "Can't you see that I'm doing this for your own good? Jesus, son, I want you to have a long healthy life! I love you. Is that a crime?"

The Sea Section came completely furnished, and the first thing we did after getting the keys was to load up all the televisions and donate them to a thrift shop. It's nice at night to work puzzles or play board games or just hang out, maybe listening to music. The only one this is difficult for is my father. Back in Raleigh, he has two or three TVs going at the same time, all tuned to the same conservative cable station, filling his falling-down house with outrage. The one reprieve is his daily visit to the gym, where he takes part in a spinning class. My sister Amy and I like to joke that his stationary bike has a front wheel as tall as a man and a rear one no bigger than a pie tin—that it's a penny-farthing, the kind people rode in the eighteen-eighties. On its handlebars we imagine a trumpet horn with a big rubber bulb on one end.

Being at the beach is a drag for our father, though, to his credit, he never complains about it, just as he never



"I'm not religious—just anti-science."

mentions the dozens of aches and pains a person his age must surely be burdened by. "I'm fine just hanging out," he says. "Being together, that's all I need." He no longer swims or golfs or fishes off the pier. We banned his right-wing radio shows, so all that's left is to shuffle from one side of the house to the other, sometimes barefoot, and sometimes wearing leather slippers the color of a new baseball mitt.

"Those are beautiful," I said the first time I noticed them. "Where did they come from?"

He looked down at his feet and cleared his throat. "A catalogue. They arrived back in the early eighties, but I only just recently started wearing them."

"If anything should ever . . . happen to you, do you think that maybe I could have them?" I asked.

"What would ever happen to me?"

In the ocean that afternoon, I watched my brother play with his daughter. The waves were high, and as Madelyn hung laughing off Paul's shoulders I thought of how we used to do the same with our own father. It was the only time any of us ever touched him. Perhaps for that reason I can still recall the feel of his skin, slick with suntan oil, and much softer than I had imagined it. Our mother couldn't keep our hands off her. If we'd had ink on our fingers, at the end of an average day she'd have been black, the way we mauled and poked and petted her. With him, though, we never dared get too close. Even in the ocean, there'd come a moment when, without warning, he'd suddenly reach his limit and shake us off, growling, "God Almighty, will you just leave me alone?"

He was so much heavier back then, always determined to lose thirty pounds. Half a century later, he'd do well to *gain* thirty pounds. Paul embraced him after our sister Tiffany died and reported that it was like hugging a coatrack. "What I do," he says every night, while Hugh puts dinner together, "is take a chicken breast, broil it with a little E.V.O.O., and serve it with some lentils—*fan-tastic!*" Though my father talks big, we suspect the bulk of his meals are whatever they're offering as free samples at his neighborhood Whole Foods, the one we give him gift cards for. How else to explain how he puts it away while we're all together, eating as if in preparation for a fast?

"Outstanding," he says between bites, the muscles of his jaws twitching beneath his spotted skin. "My compliments to the chef!"

One night, I looked over and saw that he was wearing a Cherokee headdress someone had brought to the house for Thanksgiving. Paul had put it on him, and rather than shake it off, the way he would have a few years earlier, he accepted it—owned it, really. Just before dessert was served, Amy and I noticed that he was crying. He looked like the



Indian from that old "Keep America Beautiful" ad campaign. One single tear running down his cheek. He never blubbered, or called attention to himself, and so we never asked what the problem was, or if there even *was* a problem. "Maybe he was happy that we were all together," Lisa said when we told her about it. Gretchen guessed that he was thinking about our mother, or Tiffany, while Paul wondered if it wasn't an allergic reaction to feathers. "I should order him some blue-green algae, or butterbur."

It's not that our father waited till this late in the game to win our hearts. It's that he's succeeding.

"But he didn't *used* to be this nice and agreeable," I complained to Hugh.

"Well, he is now," he said. "Why can't you let people change?"

This is akin to another of his often asked questions: "Why do you choose to remember the negative rather than the positive?"

"I don't," I insist, thinking, *I will never forget your giving me such a hard time over this.*

Honestly, though, does choice even come into it? Is it my fault that the good times fade to nothing while the bad ones burn forever bright? Memory aside, the negative just makes for a better story: the plane was delayed, an infection set in, outlaws arrived and reduced the

schoolhouse to ashes. Happiness is harder to put into words. It's also harder to source, much more mysterious than anger or sorrow, which come to me promptly, whenever I summon them, and remain long after I've begged them to leave.

For whatever reason, I was very happy with my snapping turtles. In the wild, they can live for up to forty years, though I fear that my favorite, the one with the hideous growth on his head, might not make it that long. There's something wrong with his breathing, though he still manages to mount the females every chance he gets.

"Oh, look," a passerby said, pointing down into the churning water on the last full day of our vacation. "They're playing!"

I looked at the man with an incredulity that bordered on anger. "Snapping turtles don't *play*," I said. "Not even when they're babies. They're reptiles, for Christ's sake."

"Can you believe it?" I said to my father when I got back to the beach house that evening. He was standing beside the sofa, wearing a shirt I clearly remember throwing into his trash can in the summer of 1990, and enjoying a glass of vodka with a little water in it. All around him, people were helping with dinner. Lisa and Amy were setting the table while Gretchen prepared the salad and Paul loaded his juicer with what looked like dirt. Hugh brought fish up from the grill, and as Kathy and Madelyn rounded up chairs I put on some music. "Attaboy," my father said. "That's just what we needed. Is this Hank Mobley?"

"It is," I told him.

"I thought so. I used to have this on reel-to-reel tape."

While I know I can't control it, what I ultimately hope to recall about my late-in-life father is not his nagging or his toes but, rather, his fingers, and the way he snaps them when listening to jazz. He's done it forever, signifying, much as a cat does by purring, that you may approach. That all is right with the world. "Man oh man," he'll say in my memory, lifting his glass and taking us all in. "Isn't this just *fan-tastic*?" ♦

HEADLINE OF THE WEEK

From the Associated Press.

CHINA BODY-SEARCHED 10,000 PIGEONS

I. RESURRECTION

When I try to imagine my grandfather, the face that appears to me is a variation of a pencil drawing that hangs in my parents' house. The drawing captures the earliest image of him that we have in our family. He appears to be in his thirties, and he stares down from the wall with a serious countenance, a sharply groomed mustache, a tall, stiff collar, a tie pin. He seems like a self-possessed man, with an air of formality: a formidable person.

I never had the chance to meet him. I was born in the nineteen-seventies, on Long Island, and he was born in the eighteen-eighties, in the Ottoman Empire, near the Euphrates River. He died in 1959—the year that the first spacecraft reached the moon, Fidel Castro seized power in Cuba, and Philip Roth published “Goodbye, Columbus,” though I suspect he would have known nothing of those things. What he knew was privation, mass violence, famine, deportation—and how to survive, even flourish, amid such circumstances.

My grandfather spent most of his life in Diyarbakir, a garrison town in southeastern Turkey. Magnificent old walls surround the city; built of black volcanic rock, they were begun by the Romans and then added to by Arabs and Ottomans. In 1915, the Ottomans turned the city, the surrounding province, and much of modern-day Turkey into a killing field, in a campaign of massacres and forced expulsions that came to be known as the Armenian genocide. The plan was to eradicate the empire's Armenians—“a deadly illness whose cure called for grim measures”—and it was largely successful. The Ottomans killed more than a million people, but, somehow, not my grandfather.

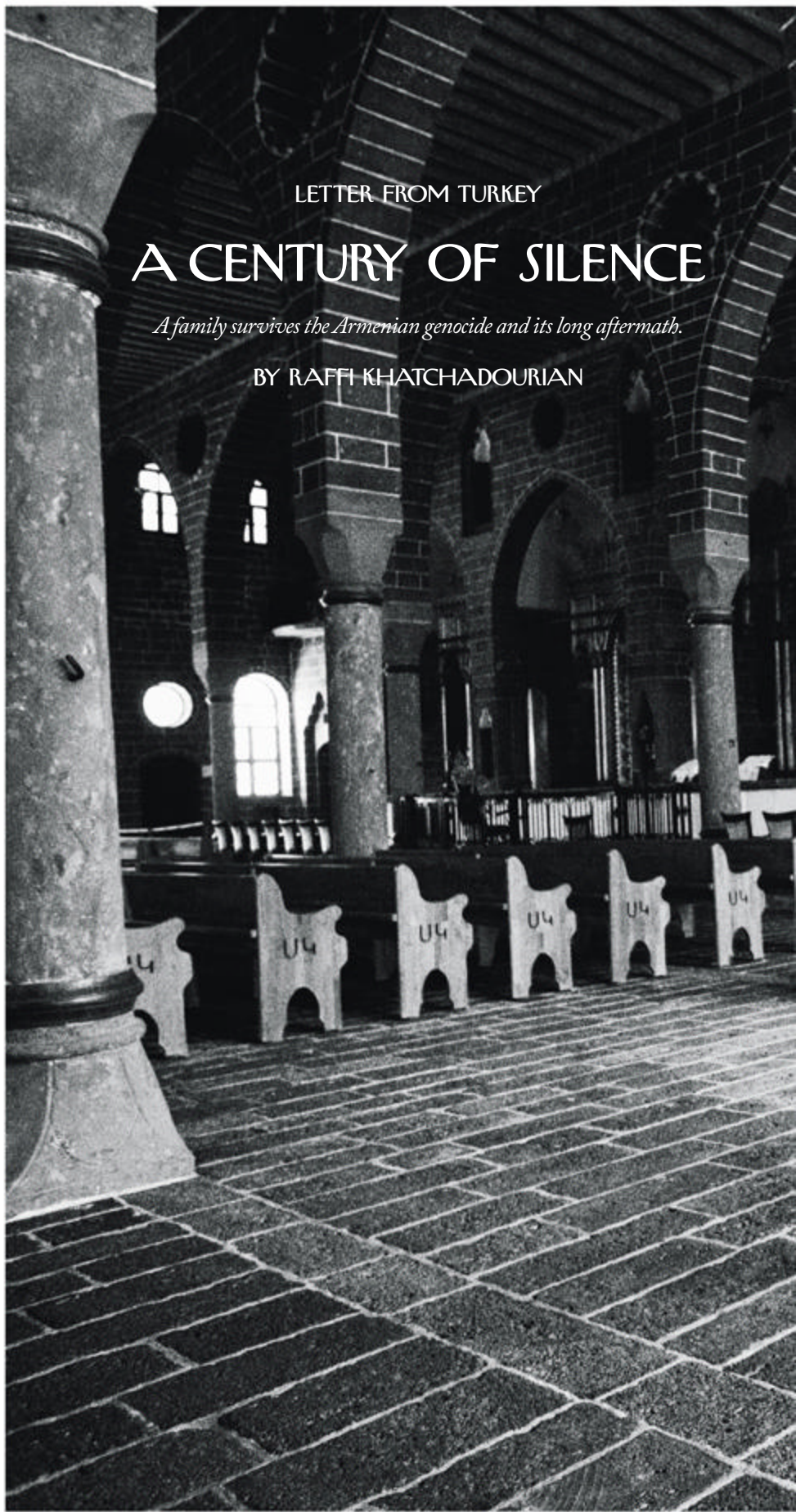
He guided his family safely through the tumult, and he remained in the city long afterward, enduring the decades of subtler persecution that followed. There was no real reckoning for the perpetrators of the genocide; many of them helped build the modern Turkish republic, founded in 1923. The violence may have been over, but its animating ideology persisted. As İsmet İnönü, the President of Turkey from 1938 to 1950, said, “Our duty is to

LETTER FROM TURKEY

A CENTURY OF SILENCE

A family survives the Armenian genocide and its long aftermath.

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN



The church of Sourp Giragos, in old Diyarbakir, fell into ruins after 1915. A few years ago, the



town rebuilt it. "Our grandparents," the mayor said, "committed wrongs, but we, their grandchildren, will not repeat them."

PHOTOGRAPHS BY PARI DUKOVIC

make Turks out of all the non-Turks within the Turkish country, no matter what. We will cut out and throw away any element that will oppose Turks and Turkishness.” The state cut away Armenians from its history. At the ruins of Ani, an ancient Armenian city near the country’s northeastern border, there was no mention of who built or inhabited it. In Istanbul, no mention of who designed the Dolmabahçe Palace, once home to sultans. This policy of erasure was called “Turkification,” and its reach extended to geography: my grandfather’s birthplace, known since the days of Timur as Jabakhchour (“diffuse water”), was renamed Bingöl (“a thousand lakes”). By a law enacted in 1934, his surname, Khatchadourian (“given by the cross”), was changed to Özakdemir (“pure white iron”).

Diyarbakir became a city of wounded cosmopolitanism, its minorities—Christians, Jews, Yazidis—greatly diminished. Still, my grandfather persisted, until 1952. My father, the twelfth of his children, grew up in Diyarbakir, and I grew up listening to his stories about it. At parties, over glasses of coffee or raki, he described the place in mythic terms, as a kind of Anatolian Macondo, populated by people with names like Haji Mama, Deli Weli, Apple Popo. But my grandfather was always elusive

in those stories, his path to survival a mystery. For nearly a century, the Turkish state has denied the Armenian genocide—until recently, you could be prosecuted even for referring to it—and so any inquiry into such things would have been fraught. But not long ago a curious thing happened. Diyarbakir, breaking with the state policy, began to indicate that, once again, its people wanted it to serve as a shared homeland. The centerpiece of the city’s experiment in renewal is a cathedral that once touched all the city’s Armenian inhabitants, my grandfather among them.

The Church of Sts. Cyriacus and Julietta, named for an early-Christian child martyr and his mother, is a wide, imposing structure, made of carved volcanic rock, that stands at the center of old Diyarbakir. In Italian, the child is San Quirico; in Armenian, Sourp Giragos. The largest Armenian church in the Middle East, it was built in the nineteenth century to a design of ecclesiastical minimalism, with a basilica containing seven altars, and a flat wooden roof supported by sixteen monolithic stone columns and rows of gracefully tapering arches. The church has gone through many cycles of destruction. In 1880, it burned to ashes,

and was rebuilt. In 1913, lightning destroyed its bell tower. Its replacement, a semi-Gothic spire housing an expensive eight-sided clock and a bell cast in Istanbul, was destroyed during the genocide—struck down on May 28, 1915, by cannon fire, because the spire surpassed the height of the city’s minarets. Or so one account claims. I should mention a more authentic-sounding story passed down in my family: One day, the spire’s architect turned up at my grandfather’s door with his tools and treasured belongings, urging him to keep them all, relaying a plan to disappear. Days later, one of the spire’s builders turned up, too, full of conflict, explaining that officials had ordered him to dismantle the spire so that its carvings and contents could be repurposed or sold.

After the genocide, the church and the few remaining Armenians of Diyarbakir became locked in a ruinous spiral, diminishing together. For a time, Sourp Giragos served as a warehouse for a state-owned bank, and as a provisional military facility. My father remembers, as a boy, looking into the basilica and seeing recruits line up to be dipped into barrels of insecticide. By the time my grandfather emigrated, the church’s most active members could fit in one photo, which my aunt keeps, carefully annotated, in one of her albums. As could be expected, the great basilica fell into disuse, with the community instead assembling in a small chapel, which my grandfather helped finance. But even this modest chapel was not small enough. People continued to leave. By 1985, there was no longer a priest: Father Arsen suddenly absent, young Kurdish boys no longer teasing him in the stone alleyways (“a monk, a monk, a glass in his rump”). Eight years later, with snow accumulating on Sourp Giragos’s neglected roof, the whole thing collapsed. Eventually, there was just Antranik Zor, a strange old man, the guardian of the ruins, who told visitors, “Everyone is gone, they have become part of the earth, only I am left.”

My sister visited Sourp Giragos at its nadir, about fifteen years ago, and found Uncle Anto, as he was known, sitting on a rock, dishevelled: loose shirt, cardigan tucked into sweatpants.



“The water for your fishbowl was approved, but it looks like for now you’re not getting the fish.”

Through a friend, she spoke to him in Turkish, but he just sat there, mute, empty-sighted. Later that afternoon, she returned and spoke to him in Armenian, and he jolted into alertness: *Who are you? Where did you come from? We haven't had a priest for so long. Do you know the Lord's Prayer?* She recited it, and he wept, and then he led her into a shed behind the ruins, a cluttered place illuminated by a single light bulb. He rummaged among his things, telling my sister that he had been waiting for her so she could protect a relic he had been guarding. He emerged with a Bible, its cover torn away, and told her to take the book to where it might be safe. He spoke with desperate urgency of what *they* would do if it remained, if *they* found it. My sister took the Bible, of course, and kept it at her house. Shortly afterward, I visited Diyarbakir, too, and went looking for Uncle Anto, but people near Sourp Giragos said he had been hospitalized—in fact, he would never leave his bed again. In the church, Kurdish boys were playing soccer, their ball arcing across the vandalized basilica, passing through the shadows of columns and arches that by then held up only sky.

The news of the city's changed atmosphere came quietly, five or six years ago, with the unlikely talk that Sourp Giragos was going to be rehabilitated as a functioning church—even though there was no congregation for it anymore. Then, in 2011, an item in the *Armenian Weekly* (which has arrived at my parents' house for as long as I can remember) made clear that the talk was real. "SOURP GIRAGOS OPENS TO THE FAITHFUL," it noted, adding that the structure "stood as defiant as ever to the forces suppressing freedom in Turkey." Several hundred people turned up for the reconsecration, nearly all of them having flown in, mostly from Istanbul, or from abroad. Diyarbakir's mayor, Osman Baydemir, told the Armenian visitors, "You are not our guests. We are your guests." Abdullah Demirbaş, the mayor of the city's old district, where my family had lived, even made reference to the great taboo—the genocide—saying, "Our grandparents, incited by others, committed wrongs, but we, their grandchildren, will not repeat them."

Hundreds of people began coming



"He brought joy to tens."

• •

to Sourp Giragos every day, the visits minor acts of curiosity, atonement, remembrance, a reckoning with a distant Armenian identity. Some came trying to piece together family history, lost stories of survival. Last April, I packed a bag (and the old Bible) and made the journey, too—to solve the mystery of my grandfather's survival, if possible, and to learn how the cathedral had been resurrected, how the city had so unexpectedly changed, and how a century of contested history could finally appear to be resolved.

Diyarbakir's walls loom from a distance as you approach, but inside them the old city feels small, almost cloistered. My father told me that during his childhood the walls were ruins infested with snakes and scorpions, and he wouldn't have dreamed of going near them. Like Sourp Giragos, the walls are now being renovated; new parks line the fortifications, which people are free to climb. Throughout the old city, historic buildings are being restored, the urban renewal accompanied by deeper social and political changes. For more than ten years, Diyarbakir was under "emergency rule"; ethnic tensions were high, and the fears that Uncle Anto had felt—of what *they*

would do if *they* came—were discernible. These days, if a stranger, a shopkeeper, a person offering directions learns that you are Armenian and of Diyarbakir ancestry, you will be ushered into a home, welcomed with tea, treated like a long-lost relative deserving honor. You will be *hemşerim*: a person of this place.

When I met with Abdullah Demirbaş, the old city's mayor, he had just completed his second term, and he was between political appointments. Demirbaş is Kurdish, and it quickly became apparent that the story of Sourp Giragos's revival was inseparable from the interweaving narratives of political violence that bound together Armenians, Kurds, and Turks for more than a century. The municipality's welcoming atmosphere, and its willingness to challenge orthodoxies about the genocide, is in many ways a Kurdish story.

In 1915, in Diyarbakir, Kurds were among the main executors of the genocide; members of prominent Kurdish clans helped plan the massacres for the Ottoman bureaucracy and grew rich by the seizure of property. In the countryside, Kurdish tribal chieftains carried out the killings with pitiless savagery. But then, not long after Mustafa

Kemal Atatürk formed the modern Turkish republic, the Kurds themselves became the objects of Turkification, as the state initiated a process to eradicate their culture. The irony was not lost on foreign observers: “It is a curious trick of fate that the Kurds, who were the principal agent employed for the deportation of Armenians, should be in danger of suffering the same fate as the Armenians only twelve years later,” the British Ambassador in Ankara reported, in 1927.

Eventually, a pathological, contradictory view of Kurds gained currency in Ankara, a view that denied that Kurds existed as a distinct ethnicity while at the same time holding that they would be irrevocably foreign unless they renounced all that made them distinct. The state insisted that Kurds were merely “Mountain Turks,” a form of Turkish peasantry. An armed nationalist movement, led by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party—the P.K.K.—emerged, and with it came the “emergency rule” in the region. The state’s agents razed villages, clearing the countryside. Extrajudicial killings were rampant, and Diyarbakir’s prison became notorious for torture and disappearances. As a Kurdish politician recalled, “They hung me up by my arms, nude, and attached electric wires to my genitals and anus. When they turned on the current, my whole body would tremble; they call this ‘doing the plane.’”

As the villagers fled to Diyarbakir from the surrounding areas, it became a Kurdish city. In time, the Diyarbakir Kurds began to recognize that their role in the genocide was a kind of original sin in their modern political history. “I remember this one Armenian priest,” Demirbaş told me. “A Kurd was insulting him, and this priest told him, ‘We were the breakfast for them, you will be the lunch. Don’t forget.’ And that was important for me.”

Demirbaş, a big man with an easy smile, was born in 1966, in a Kurdish village called Sise; his family moved to Diyarbakir when he was one. “When I first went to primary school, I wasn’t able to speak Turkish,” he said. “The teacher asked me a question, and I didn’t understand, and the next thing I remember she was holding my ears and bashing my head against the wall. I

didn’t go to school for a week.” The school he attended was Süleyman Nazif Elementary, named for an Ottoman notable. Thirty years earlier, my father had attended the same school, and I recalled similar stories from him about everyday aggression—about the insult *gâvur*, meaning “infidel,” the epithet carrying echoes of 1915. For my father, the atmosphere was intolerable, and he dropped out; my grandfather bought his diploma with bags of rice.

Demirbaş had the opposite reaction: inspired by Socrates, he became a teacher of philosophy. Between 1983 and 1991, the Kurdish language was illegal, but he and his wife named their daughter Berfin, the Kurdish name for a pale-colored flower—a decision that instantly triggered prosecution. The legal battle went to Turkey’s Supreme Court, and by the time Demirbaş won, his daughter was a year old. As a teacher, he confronted the bureaucracy of Turkification with similarly mild gestures, each time eliciting a severe legal reaction. The government moved Demirbaş from school to school. In 2001, he was posted to Sivas, a deeply conservative city, where he wrote a press release stating that all people in Turkey had a right to education in their native languages. He was fired. Destitute, he returned to Diyarbakir, and was elected to lead a teachers’ union. From there, he entered politics, and in 2004 he became mayor of Diyarbakir’s old city.

At the time he lost his teaching job, he had been charged in as many as a hundred cases. Some of them, owing to changes in the law, were dropped; many others were added, and now he does not know how many there are. His lawyer told him that if he lost every case his combined prison term would be four hundred and eighty-three years. It seemed strange that Demirbaş could not keep track of his legal affairs, but as he spoke about his cases, I began to understand his confusion. Shortly after he was elected, a twelve-year-old Kurdish boy was fatally shot while police were gunning down his father, in front of their house; Demirbaş erected a sculpture to mark the tragedy, with thirteen holes carved into it, representing the boy’s gunshot wounds. He was prosecuted: misuse of municipal office

and resources. (Three years.) The case went to the Supreme Court, which remanded it to a terrorism court, which threw it out—though now, on appeal, it has made its way back to the Supreme Court. In 2006, at a conference in Vienna, he presented a paper, “Municipal Services and Local Governments in Light of Multilingualism.” This time, the charge against him was “propagandizing for a terrorist organization.” (Five years.) When he issued a multilingual tourist brochure, in Turkish, Kurdish, Armenian, and Assyrian, he was charged. He was charged for speaking Kurdish while officiating at a wedding.

In 2007, the government forced Demirbaş out of office, and so he phoned a friend who owned a house near the municipal headquarters and set himself up there as shadow mayor. Journalists, dignitaries, and assemblymen still sought his advice, as did his constituents, who came by the hundreds, with offerings of tea and sugar. Members of his former staff raised funds to cover a small budget and volunteered during off hours. Demirbaş’s teen-age children took jobs to support the family. In this way, he continued his term. And the state continued finding new ways to charge him.

In 2009, Diyarbakir Armenians—living, as many did, in Istanbul—came to Demirbaş to discuss restoring the cathedral. Demirbaş had just been reelected, by a wide margin, and the national attitude toward the Armenian minority and toward the genocide was slowly beginning to soften. The ascendancy of Recep Erdoğan, of the Justice and Development Party, to the office of Prime Minister, in 2003, initially signalled a new willingness to confront Turkish political orthodoxies. In Istanbul, the Armenian journalist Hrant Dink founded *Agos*, a newspaper—and when Dink was assassinated, in 2007, a hundred thousand people protested, many holding up signs that said, “We are all Armenians!” Thirty thousand people also put their names to a statement of apology, which read, “My conscience does not accept the denial of, and the insensitivity toward, the Great Catastrophe that the Ottoman Armenians were subjected to in



When a newspaper asked Abdullah Demirbaş, the old town's mayor, for his message to Turkey's uprooted Armenians, he said, "Return!"

1915. I reject this injustice and I share the feelings and pain of my Armenian brothers and sisters. I apologize to them.” The Ministry of Culture restored an important Armenian cathedral on an island in Lake Van.

But the limits to these gestures were unmistakable. The state had renovated the Lake Van cathedral, but as a museum; for three years, it would not allow a Mass to be held there.

Turkification had not fully abated. As recently as 2005, the Environment and Forestry Ministry announced plans to correct the “ill intent” of scientific nomenclature that violated “Turkish unity”: thus, the species of deer known as *Capreolus capreolus armenus* became *Capreolus capreolus capreolus*. Even as people mourned Hrant Dink, death threats poured into his former office. And when the Turkish President, Abdullah Gül, responding to the apology campaign, offered a woolly statement about the possibility of “dialogue,” a nationalist accused him of having Armenian ancestry. Gül, rushing to prove a genealogy of Turkishness “for centuries,” sued for defamation—and won. In parliament, a legislator’s motion to adopt the apology caused an uproar; the chairman cut him off, accusing him of “insulting the society in which you live.” A new campaign—“I do *not* apologize”—got far more signatories.

The Diyarbakir Armenians went to the Ministry of Culture, seeking financial assistance to renovate the church. The ministry agreed to pay the full cost, more than two million dollars, but only in exchange for the deed, intending to convert the structure into a museum. Vartkes Ergün Ayık, the head of the Sourp Giragos Foundation, which led the restoration effort, told me that it took no time to decline: better to let it remain in ruins than stand as an empty symbol. Instead, he brought a delegation to see Diyarbakir’s mayor, Osman Baydemir, whose jurisdiction spanned the entire city. Baydemir, whose family had sheltered Armenians a century earlier, agreed to help, but argued that a majority of the financing should come from Armenians, so that they

would be invested in the project. In the end, Ayık secured most of the funding from private donors.

Ayık’s family had left Diyarbakir the same year that mine had, in 1952, and I learned that my grandparents had arranged for my father to work a few summers in his father’s haberdashery, near the Great Mosque. By the standards of the city, this practically made us family. In the nineteen-fifties, Ayık’s father had campaigned to have Sourp Giragos returned to Armenians from the state-owned bank, and Ayık was in many ways following in his footsteps. One night at his home, he showed me binders of notes that his father had made: survival testimonies typed up on onionskin paper, folk poems, Ottoman



deeds, lists of Armenian villages, their old and new names—the basis of a lost manuscript that he was trying to find. Although Ayık acknowledged the Kurds’ regret, he seemed unwilling to relinquish his caution. Already, academics had coined a new term, “Kurdification,” to describe the Kurds’ effort to claim their place in the region’s culture. He recalled one day asking Demirbaş, “If Kurdish autonomy were granted, then would your embrace of minority rights remain?” Demirbaş laughed and said yes.

In truth, the benevolent conspiracy to rebuild Sourp Giragos—Armenians and Kurds working in an unlikely partnership—was fragile. Just as reconstruction began, in 2009, both Diyarbakir mayors were indicted in a dragnet, apparently designed to crush the region’s Kurdish political leadership. Demirbaş’s home was raided at 5:30 A.M. Police detained him at gunpoint, and, at the station, he found himself being handcuffed by a former student—with the student, eyes full, hesitating, and Demirbaş assuring him that there was no point in delay. The charge was grave—membership in an illegal affiliate of the P.K.K.—and Demirbaş denied it. He stayed in the Diyarbakir prison until 2010, when he was released for medical reasons. The case is ongoing.

Still, he kept at it. He set out to re-

name three streets for local writers: a Kurd, an Armenian, and an Assyrian. He used municipal funds to run Armenian-language courses and erected a signboard in Armenian welcoming visitors. Within his jurisdiction, seventeen parcels of land that had been taken from the church were returned. He told the *Armenian Weekly*, “We want the people living in the city to realize that, historically, Diyarbakir has always been a multicultural city.” When the *Weekly* asked, “What is your message to the Armenians who were uprooted from their ancestral lands?” Demirbaş said, “Return!”

My grandfather arrived in the city as a young child in dire circumstances. His story begins in Jabakhchour, about a hundred miles north of Diyarbakir, where his father, Khatchadour, was a prominent landowner. Khatchadour had two stepsons, and, in the eighteen-eighties, one of them shoved a Kurdish man in a fight, and the man fell to his death. The stepson was imprisoned and sentenced to death by hanging, but Khatchadour paid to have his life spared. Outraged, the Kurdish man’s family burned his fields, stole his livestock, and threatened murder. Khatchadour took his family—including my grandfather, who was probably no more than two years old—and fled toward Diyarbakir, where Sourp Giragos had established itself as a haven for pilgrims. Along the way, they met an Armenian tailor—a *terzi*, in Turkish—who lived in the city, and he invited them to stay with him. Not long after, another disaster struck: a cholera epidemic swept through Diyarbakir, killing Khatchadour and two of his children. My grandfather and his mother were spared, though, and the tailor looked after them.

Diyarbakir was in a state of upheaval. The empire was declining precipitously, and Ottoman leaders, hoping to maintain a dominion that extended from Tunis to Basra, had imposed reforms, meant to unify peoples of different faiths and languages around an Ottoman identity. The new measures augmented individual rights, upending an old theocratic order that placed the empire’s Christians beneath its

Muslims, and they promised greater equality for Armenians. But the reforms were fitfully enacted, and for the most part they only made life worse. Many Kurds, feeling that their divinely ordained status was threatened, lashed out violently at their neighbors.

The sense of popular resentment was compounded after Ottomans lost territory in the Russo-Turkish War. In the Treaty of Berlin, the Great Powers sought to dictate the fate of the empire, committing the sultan to implementing reforms “in the provinces inhabited by Armenians, and to guarantee their security against the Circassians and Kurds.” The sultan, Abdülhamid II, saw the Armenians’ strengthening ties to the West as evidence of treason. He formed a Kurdish militia, to bring fiefs under tighter state control, and he used it to exact punishment, massacring a hundred thousand Armenians.

In Diyarbakir, fears that the reforms would grant Armenians too much autonomy erupted into a pogrom. (Süleyman Nazif wrote, “Like our grandfathers before us, our principal task is to work for the glory of the Caliphate and to augment its population. This is the road upon which we will travel, to death.”) For three days in November, 1895, the city was engulfed in ethnic violence. Gunfire broke out near the Great Mosque, and Muslims pillaged Armenian shops and homes, going door to door, killing hundreds. The market was set aflame, and the smoke was visible for thirty-five miles.

No one in my family knows how my grandfather survived, but it is clear that he was finding a place for himself. When he was about ten, the tailor decided to teach him his trade. “What is your family name?” the tailor asked. My grandfather didn’t know, nor did his mother. So the tailor said, “Well, what was your father’s name?” My grandfather said it was Khatchadour. “Then your name will be Khatchadourian.”

My grandfather’s given name was Hagop—Armenian for Jacob—but at some point he also adopted a Muslim street name, Sait, and among non-Armenians became known as Terzi Sait—Sait the tailor. Eventually, he opened a store near the Great Mosque,

in the center of the city, and on Easter morning I went looking for the old storefront. Nothing of it remained, but the area was still filled with tiny shops, lining an avenue that bisects old Diyarbakir.

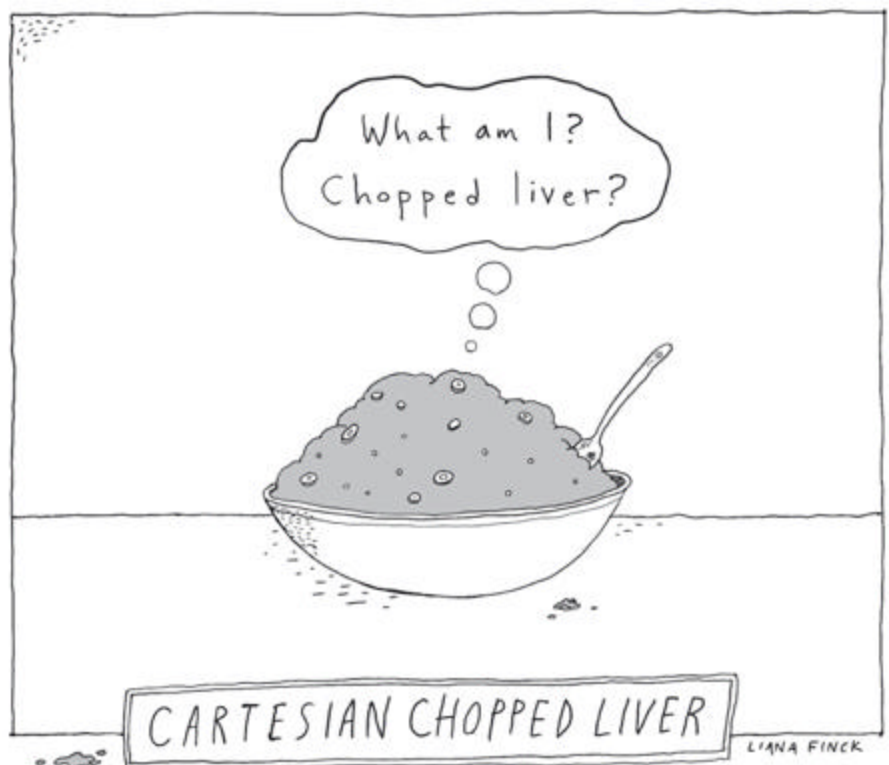
It was a short walk from there to Sourp Giragos, past tea stalls, produce vendors, and a five-hundred-year-old minaret precariously balanced atop four small columns. Closer to the church, the shops and street clutter fell away; the narrow stone alleys became more uniform, the turns easier to confuse. In places, the reconstructed bell tower loomed into view. The effect of entering the large church courtyard—with its garden, its sycamore maples, and its wooden tea tables—was similar to driving out of a tunnel and emerging into the clear. Nothing of Sourp Giragos’s dilapidation remained. The church had been built from “female basalt,” volcanic rock so porous that it breathed. Because female basalt had been mined to depletion, the porosity in many of the reconstructed stone blocks was ersatz; still, one had the sense of entering a living structure.

That Sunday was the first Easter to be celebrated at the cathedral since its reconstruction, and a gruff priest named Father Kevork had flown in

from Istanbul to conduct Mass. Although the church was open every day, the patriarchy was slow to assign it a permanent priest. Likewise, Armenians living overseas seemed hesitant about supporting the church, in a place where there was no obvious community for it. Ayık was still struggling to raise four hundred thousand dollars to pay outstanding bills. His daughter asked me if I knew how to reach Kim Kardashian.

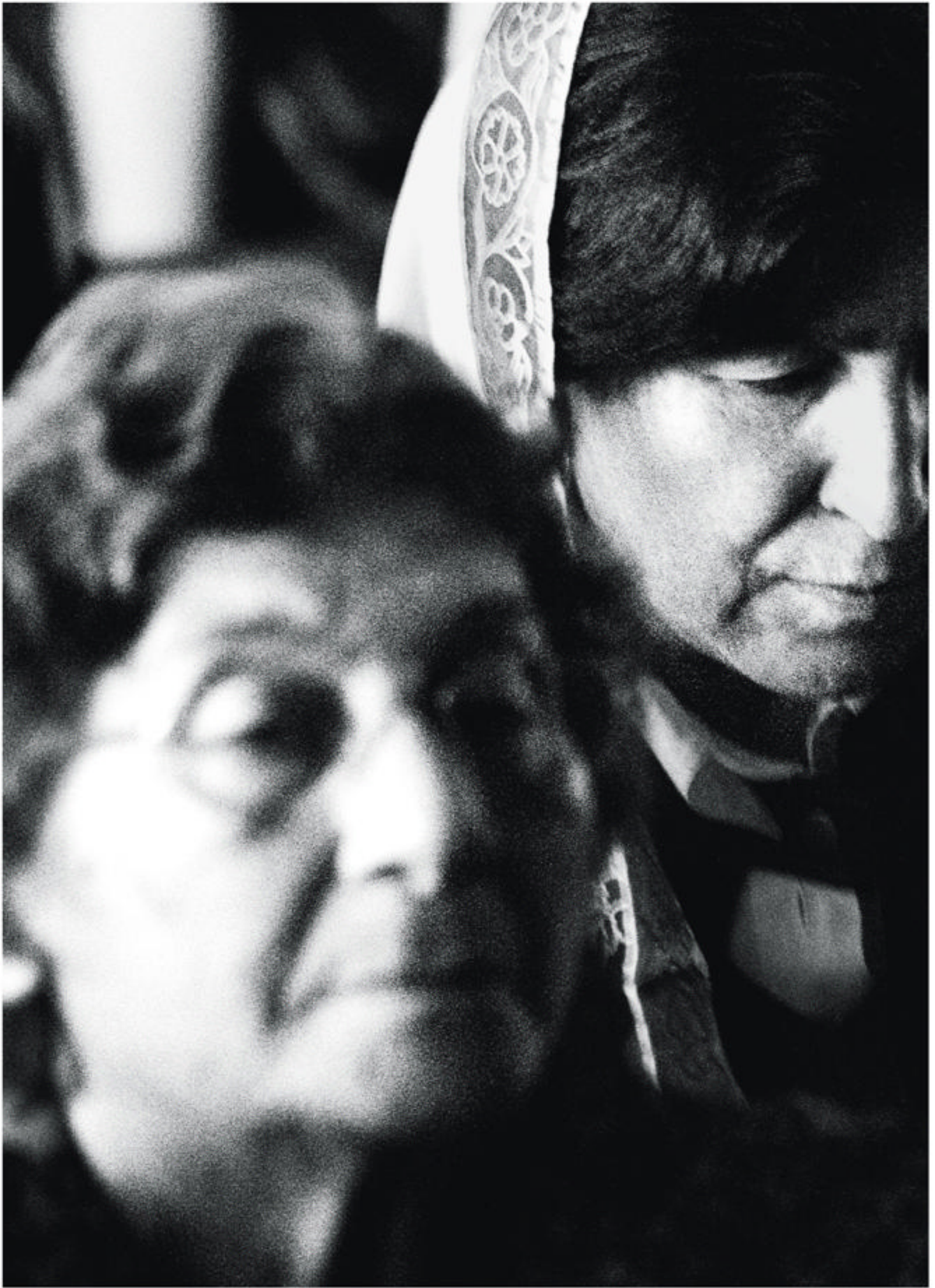
Part of the apathy was surely rooted in a general suspicion about investing in a country where “Armenian” is a form of slander. But Ayık thought there might also be a deeper cultural pathology at work. To get behind a functioning church would mean shedding the posture of enraged victim, he argued. There was also a more obvious question: What was the building’s purpose? Demirbaş said that the reconstruction was an act of self-criticism, an apology, a symbol of harmony. Ayık said the church served as a monument to those who had once been there. Yet these things it could do just fine as a semi-dormant religious structure, with Father Kevork now and again flying in.

It did not, however, take long, sitting in that courtyard on Easter





Easter Mass this year in Sourp Giragos. Because the church still has no priest assigned to it, a priest flies in from Istanbul.



It is unknown how many people in Turkey have hidden Armenian ancestry. Estimates range from thirty thousand to three million.

morning, to understand that the new Sourp Giragos needed to function as a church to fulfill its particular purpose in the climate of residual Turkification. Uncle Anto had said, “Only I am left,” but it turned out that all around the ruins of Sourp Giragos there were people of mixed Armenian heritage, people whose fathers or mothers or grandmothers had been taken in by Turks or Kurds in 1915, married into Muslim families, and assumed new names and identities. In villages, where no one’s ancestry was ever very secret, they were often recognized, and became known by the epithet “remnants of the sword.” No one knows the true size of this hidden population across Turkey, and estimates range from thirty thousand to three million; the secret identities are only now starting to emerge. A few years ago, a group of these people had come to Sourp Giragos to be baptized, their names kept quiet for security reasons. But that they had stepped forward was significant, and I could see how a working church would signal, in ways a token one could not, that being Armenian in Turkey was becoming acceptable.

On Easter morning, the two church caretakers, Aram Khatchigian and Armen Demirjian, were rushing around with preparations, but they took a few minutes to have tea with me in the courtyard. “If you really dig deep, sixty per cent of the people in the city have some Armenian background,” Khatchigian told me. “I’m basing this on the people who come to the church. From my family, seven people survived 1915. Actually, there were seven orphans who had come together and supported each other—my grandfather was one of them—and by supporting each other they ended up becoming a family. If you look at their descendants, these people do accept that they are Armenian, but nearly all of them are Muslims. From the day I was born, I have known myself to be Armenian—unlike Armen, who did not learn about it until he was twenty-five years old.” Both men, given Muslim names at birth, renamed themselves in honor of Armenian ancestors.

At nine or so in the morning, Khatchigian walked to the entrance

of the church and rang the bell. Inside, pews were slowly filling, the air thickening with incense. In my father’s childhood, Armenians gathered for Easter at the Chaldean Catholic Church; they stayed past midnight on Holy Thursday, and at the ceremony’s climax the lights were extinguished and hymns resounded in the dark. Here the ceremony was informal, almost formless, with people dropping in and out of attentiveness. Wandering among the eight hundred people at Sourp Giragos—many of them Muslim—I could see that what they were celebrating was not Easter but the idea that Easter had been resurrected. As the crowd dispersed, I introduced myself to an elderly man in the front pew.

“Who’s your grandfather?” he asked.

“Hagop Khatchadourian.”

“I don’t know anyone by that name. Who’s your father?”

“Puzant Khatchadourian.”

“I don’t know him, either.” The old man gazed past me. “I did know a Puzant, once,” he said. “A long time ago—Terzi Sait’s son.”

TO-DO LIST

- Sharpen all pencils.
- Check off-side rear tire pressure.
- Defrag hard drive.
- Consider life and times of Donald Campbell, CBE.
- Shampoo billiard-room carpet.
- Learn one new word per day.
- Make circumnavigation of Coniston Water by foot, visit Coniston Cemetery to pay respects.
- Achieve Grade 5 Piano by Easter.
- Go to fancy-dress party as Donald Campbell complete with crash helmet and life jacket.
- Draft pro-forma apology letter during meditation session.
- Check world ranking.
- Skim duckweed from ornamental pond.
- Make fewer “apples to apples” comparisons.
- Consider father’s achievements only as barriers to be broken.
- Dredge Coniston Water for sections of wreckage/macabre souvenirs.
- Lobby service provider to unbundle local loop network.
- Remove all invasive species from British countryside.
- Build 1/25 scale model of Bluebird K7 from toothpicks and spent matches.
- Compare own personality with traits of those less successful but more popular.
- Eat (optional).

“But Terzi Sait was my grandfather,” I said.

“Yes, yes, Terzi Sait,” the man said. “I remember. A good man.”

My grandfather’s assumed name means “happy” in Arabic, and I thought about this the next day, on my way to a part of the old city called the Citadel. Built upon an embankment overlooking the Tigris, the Citadel once contained a prison, official buildings, gardens, a church, and a mosque. A later addition was an office for the special-intelligence branch of the gendarmerie. Many Kurds, taken there in the nineties, never returned. In recent years, more than forty-five Kurdish mass graves had been identified in the region, and in 2012 a cache of bones was discovered at the Citadel. They were delivered to the Forensic Medicine Institute, in Istanbul, which concluded that “the bones were lying in the earth for at least one hundred years.” A century ago, the Citadel was a departure point for the deportations of Armenians: forced marches, the vast majority ending in death. Mass

- Breathe (optional).
- Petition for high-speed fibre-optic broadband to this postcode.
- Order by express delivery DVD copy of “Across the Lake” starring Anthony Hopkins as “speed king Donald Campbell.”
- Gain a pecuniary advantage.
- Initiate painstaking reconstruction of Donald Campbell’s final seconds using archive film footage and forensic material not previously released into public domain.
- Polyfilla all surface cracking to Bonneville Salt Flats, Utah.
- Levitate.
- Develop up to four thousand five hundred pounds/force of thrust.
- Carry on regardless despite suspected skull fracture.
- Attempt return run before allowing backwash ripples to completely subside.
- Open her up.
- Subscribe to convenient one-a-day formulation of omega-oil capsules for a balanced and healthy diet.
- Reserve full throttle for performance over “measured mile.”
- Relocate to dynamic urban hub.
- Eat standing up to avoid time-consuming table manners and other nonessential mealtime rituals.
- Remain mindful of engine cutout caused by fuel starvation.
- Exceed upper limits.
- Make extensive observations during timeless moments of somersaulting prior to impact.
- Disintegrate.

—*Simon Armitage*

violence was buried in the city like strata of rock. My grandfather used to say that in 1915 he heard screams from the Citadel; the dead, he had recalled, were dumped onto blood-soaked earth below.

II. INFERNO

A century after the Armenian genocide, many details of its origins remain obscure. The pervasive state denial has corrupted access to official archives—with some closed, and others open in limited ways—and forced upon the research the distortions of politics. Key Ottoman records are missing or have been destroyed. Still, it is clear that the violence of the genocide flowed from deep streams of political insecurity. Hitler spoke of Germany being “broken and defenseless, exposed to the kicks of all the world.” His Ottoman counterparts felt a similar civilizational crisis.

In 1908, a group of reformers called the Young Turks emerged from the empire’s periphery and began to wrest

control from the sultan. Pragmatic, fractious, and ideologically malleable, they came to power promising greater freedoms and imperial unity; they named their political party the Committee of Union and Progress (C.U.P.). But the empire that they sought to unify was inexorably unravelling. Within several years, they settled on a principle called Turkism, which envisioned an ethnically unified state. The idea was to create “an ideal homeland that gathers in all the Turks and excludes foreigners.”

A C.U.P. office was opened in Diyarbakir by one of the movement’s central ideologues. There is this story in our family: Near my grandfather’s shop, by the Great Mosque, there was a khan where a mufti named Haji İbrahim—who belonged to the prominent Pirinçizade clan—drank tea. My grandfather began joining him, and they grew close. One day, as they sat together, a young man approached: the mufti’s son, Şeref—handsome, full of revolutionary fervor, the author of an article arguing that Armenians were “treach-

erous.” Şeref spoke of joining the C.U.P., but his father expressed uneasiness with the movement. “It smells of blood,” he said. Gesturing toward my grandfather, he added, “No harm will come to him.”

In 1914, my grandfather was about thirty—a bachelor, still, unusually for his age. By then, he had established a reputation for making Western clothing, and he took trips to Lebanon and Syria to buy sewing equipment and luxurious fabric. He bought a house by Diyarbakir’s Gâvur Mahallesi, the Infidel District—a gracious building with a large courtyard, a well, and an old tree.

One day, he met a coppersmith who shared his surname. Kevork Khatchadourian had a thin face, a long nose, big eyes. He, too, had survived the pogrom of 1895. When the violence began, and Armenian shopkeepers debated what to do, Kevork made his way to Sourp Giragos, brought his children home from the school, and fortified the door with a stone. His shop was destroyed. For a time, to escape cholera, the family fled to a village. After they returned to Diyarbakir, his financial situation remained dire, and he was forced to sell his house.

Kevork and his family became tenants in my grandfather’s home. For my grandfather’s mother, their arrival was fortuitous. She wanted her aging son to marry—she said it, and said it, and said it, enough to engrave it into time itself—and Kevork had a daughter, Zevart, an intelligent, strong-willed girl with dark hair and dark eyes. Kevork’s wife was protective of her: she was a schoolgirl, and my grandfather was twice her age. But my grandfather’s mother was driven, and on Zevart’s sixteenth birthday—February 14, 1914—they married. The First World War had not yet begun, and perhaps the two had reason for optimism.

Still, the empire was falling to pieces. Ethnic tensions were growing. In the Balkan Wars, a series of mostly Christian rebel groups, abetted by foreign allies, stripped the Ottomans of nearly all their European territories. One military officer wrote, “Our anger is strengthening: revenge,

revenge, revenge." A few months later, he became the Minister of War. During the Armistice, the Great Powers again imposed reforms to improve treatment of the Armenians, but they were never enacted. As imperial unity became paramount, the C.U.P. began to enforce Turkism through deportation. A system of quotas took shape, in which no Ottoman territory should be more than ten per cent Armenian.

In January, 1915, the empire suffered another catastrophic loss, this time on the Russian front: tens of thousands of Ottoman soldiers lay dead, and a deep Russian incursion seemed imminent. The loss was a result of the First World War, but the crisis of war also offered an opportunity for even more drastic measures. In March, a member of the C.U.P. noted, "It has been decided to wash our hands of responsibility for this stain that has been smeared across Ottoman history." An élite security apparatus, the Special Organization, insured that deportation meant annihilation; it helped mobilize bands of irregulars, most prominent among them Kurds who knew the landscape in detail. A new governor was dispatched to Diyarbakir. He had vowed to take the "most decisive measures."

On April 24th, in Istanbul, more than two hundred Armenian intellectuals—poets, doctors, writers, members of parliament—were arrested and, with a few exceptions, killed. The date marks the official shackling of the empire's salvation to genocide. Convoys were directed into Diyarbakir Province or on into the Syrian Desert, to camps where people were massacred or allowed to die from privation. Eventually, the genocide became its own rationale. When the U.S. Ambassador implored the Interior Minister to reverse course, he was told, "The hatred between the Turks and the Armenians is now so intense that we have got to finish with them. If we don't, they will plan their revenge."

Like many Armenians outside Turkey, I grew up in an atmosphere where the desire for revenge was not always easy to separate from the desire for justice. In community centers, it was often possible to find posters of

Armenians who had murdered Turkish officials during a spate of political assassinations in the seventies and eighties. They were heroes—*fedayeen*—and children were encouraged to honor them, to write to them if they were in prison. The idea of reconciliation was unimaginable. Any distinction between Kurds and Turks was immaterial; they were the same, worthy of the same suspicion, mockery, and hatred.

There was an attendee at Sourp Giragos on Easter who knew this sense of vengeance as well as anyone: Ara Sarafian, an independent historian, activist, and combatant in the war over Anatolian history. Sarafian's family had mostly survived the genocide and afterward had moved to Cyprus, where he spent his childhood. But, in 1974, while he and his parents were in London on a family vacation, the Turkish Army invaded Cyprus, and they were suddenly refugees. Perhaps it was inevitable that he would come to hate Turks, with a deep teen-age hatred. As a graduate student, he vowed to learn Turkish to confront the state's official denials as a scholar. "I wanted to hurt Turks," he told me. He applied for a fellowship in Ankara, and when he was turned down (his Armenian surname the deciding factor, he was certain) he went anyway, paying his tuition by teaching English. Coming to Turkey transformed him, in an unexpected way. The combined effect of getting to know Turkish citizens, of higher education, of maturity, and of changing Turkish politics eroded the teen-age hatred until he began to seek out opportunities for reconciliation. In London, he founded a small press, called the Gomidas Institute, with a straightforward mission: unearthing and publishing firsthand accounts of 1915. But in the past few years he has widened his portfolio, making trips to Turkey to investigate how the genocide remains a part of lived experience there, and how official denials are at odds with local memory. Sarafian regards his new work as ambassadorial, engaging in a cautious handshake with politicians like Abdullah Demirbaş.

Recently, Sarafian went to Bitlis, the ancestral home of William Sa-

royan, to encourage its mayor to name a street after the writer. A friend there took him into the countryside. "We went to this one village," he told me. "And we met this Kurdish man who owned a fish farm, and there was an old church, a very small church, and this guy made us tea and said, 'You know, I own this church.' And I could have said nothing, I could have let it go, but I asked him, 'How can you own a church?' And he said, 'It's quite simple, really. In 1915, an order came down to kill all the Armenians, and afterward we divided up the property, and that is how our family got this church.' As I was leaving, he came to me and said, 'You tell me what you want me to do with this church, and I will do it.' Now, how can I hate this guy? I have to embrace him."

Last year, Sarafian obtained permission from Diyarbakir's leadership to commemorate the genocide there—the first time such a thing had been achieved. He organized a ceremony on a bridge spanning the Tigris, from which mourners tossed rose petals into the river. A few months later, Demirbaş urged the Turkish government to follow the city's example: "We Kurds, in the name of our ancestors, apologize for the massacres and deportations of the Armenians and Assyrians in 1915. We will continue our struggle to secure atonement and compensation for them."

During his stay in Diyarbakir, Sarafian had ventured into the countryside, to conduct interviews with villagers. In his research, he stumbled on the descendants of a Kurdish tribe that had gone to war in 1915 to protect Armenians. Since that visit, Sarafian had wanted to plant rosebushes at the tribal leader's grave. The gesture was necessary, he said, to show reciprocity, to underscore that the common Armenian biases against Kurds—as bloodthirsty savages—could also be relinquished. "Kurds are very apologetic," he told me. "They know massacres took place, they know Kurds were involved. It is up to us to say, 'I appreciate your sincerity and the manner in which you are dealing with this, that you are feeling guilty—but we are in no way accusing Kurds as a nation of being somehow

predisposed to commit genocide.' My criticism of Armenians is that we shouldn't just wallow in victimhood. It doesn't help us, either."

The day after Easter, I met Sarafian at his hotel to accompany him on the trip. He has cropped graying hair and a perpetually furrowed brow. In a rented car, we drove for about an hour and a half, and stopped near a cluster of modest homes in isolated rock-strewn pastures. Several men—gray suits, white shirts, open collars—approached. Sarafian embraced one of them. The tribal leader in 1915 was Haji Mehmet Mishte, and this was one of his grandsons, Recep Karabulut. Before long, Sarafian was saying that Karabulut was like a brother, and Karabulut was saying that Sarafian was kin. There were handshakes, callused grips. Sarafian conversed quickly with the others:

"I brought two roses, so we can plant them."

"Let us go, let us go together."

"We must pray."

"Of course we will pray."

The village cemetery was just up the hill, one of the men said. We climbed back into our car. "We have a common culture here," Sarafian said as he drove. "You can't separate Armenians from Kurds." When we reached the graveyard, Sarafian took the rosebushes from the car and, giving one to Karabulut, told him, "We have been separated by a hundred years." Karabulut said, "History has unified us now." Then the men walked to an Ottoman-era grave. The headstone had weathered, rounded edges, and Arabic script carved on its face. A village cleric read the inscription, a line of poetry about the impermanence of life, and then read the date that concluded Mishte's impermanence—which, it was determined after much debate about the Ottoman calendar, was probably 1917. Sarafian tied a strip

of cloth to a nearby bush, an ancient ritual marking a pilgrimage, and said a few words honoring Mishte. At the foot of the grave, he began to dig. The shovel broke. But he continued, knees in the soil, until the roses were firmly anchored. Everyone prayed.

The tribe had slaughtered a lamb, and we headed to a house on a hill, where it was served. While everyone

a century ago, capturing its subject in a hopeful act, innocent of what was to come.

For Diyarbakir, the genocide came in the form of the newly assigned *vali*, or regional governor, Dr. Mehmet Reşid—an Ottoman middle manager of startling effectiveness, responsible for the deaths of more than a hundred thousand people. Reşid was a Muslim Circassian from the Russian-controlled Caucasus, where his family had survived an earlier violent purge. Beginning in 1860, the Tsar forced hundreds of thousands of Muslims from the region, pursuing them to the shores of the Black Sea, from which they were delivered to the Ottoman Empire on ships that became known as "floating graveyards." Reşid was born in 1873, and his family moved to Istanbul a year later. He enrolled in the Military School of Medicine and, preoccupied with the sultan's despotism, helped found the C.U.P. "I always desired law and justice," he wrote in his memoirs. "I always had the friendship and confidence of all my companions; I never took part in certain villainous behavior."

With the Ottoman state collapsing around him, Reşid's outlook began to harden. He served in various official posts—the Aegean, Mosul, Baghdad—growing increasingly concerned that the empire's Christians posed a grave internal threat. Ot-

toman Greeks, one C.U.P. member had declared, "needed to be broken and destroyed," and Reşid came to agree. On the Aegean, he aggressively deported them, hoping to replace them with Turkish refugees. By the time he arrived in Baghdad, he was a changed man. As Süleyman Nazif recalled, "Instead of the old poised character and calm, there was an appalling arrogance and anger."

In Diyarbakir, Reşid confronted crumbling state authority. Corruption



At front, the author's grandmother, his father, and his grandfather.

ate, my eyes drifted to a muted TV, to a news item about April 24th, the Armenian Day of Remembrance. For the past several years, commemorations have been held in Istanbul. April 24th was just days away, and the story included file footage of a previous year's event: people sitting on pavement, holding photos of the Armenian intellectuals who had been rounded up in the capital and murdered. No calls for justice, no demands, just sitting, holding pictures—each portrait, from



"It's probably bad news if she refers to the second date as 'mission creep.'"

was entrenched, and soldiers were deserting. Many deserters were Armenian, and when they took to the city's flattened rooftops they became known as the Roof Battalion. Reşid saw in them an élite unit to massacre Muslims; he arrested them and tried to extract information by torture, but he discovered no plot. He imposed censorship, and proclaimed the confiscation of all weapons. The Diyarbakir Armenians gathered to discuss what to do; my grandfather later spoke of a meeting where a man announced that he had stockpiled guns beyond the city walls. But the community decided that militancy was too risky and surrendered their weapons. Reşid, believing that Sourp Giragos had become a makeshift armory, had it searched, its prelate murdered. He found nothing. In time, the cathedral was looted. "Some poured out of the church clutching thuribles, chalices, and other sacred vessels," one observer recalled. "They roamed streets sounding the cymbals and fly-flaps and treading on the pages torn from the Bible."

Quickly, Reşid created a strike force, designed to conduct "special measures"

and acts of "punishment" throughout the province. The unit became known as the Butcher's Battalion. Seeking to assemble Kurdish irregulars, he pardoned exiled members of a tribe known for banditry. He reached out to the tribe's leaders and described a plan to put Armenians onto rafts called keleks (branches piled atop inflated goat skins) and send them down the Tigris. "I will give you convoy after convoy of Armenians," he said, according to an account by the grandson of one tribal leader. "You will bring them by kelek across the Tigris. When you arrive at a place where no one can see or hear, you will kill them all." Reşid recommended that the bodies be filled with rocks, in order to sink them. "Of the gold, money, and jewels, half of it is yours, the other half you will bring to me to give to the Red Crescent. But no one can hear or know about this secret."

In Diyarbakir, Reşid had imprisoned nearly two thousand prominent Christians, mostly Armenians, and in May, 1915, they were called into the prison courtyard, where mufti İbrahim read a document explaining that they had been pardoned but would be deported to Mosul: "You may return to

your homes once the war is terminated. You are delivered from a great responsibility." Late that month, more than six hundred Armenians were sent down the river and killed. Reşid had notified his counterpart in Mosul to expect the rafts, but they arrived empty, followed by bloated corpses and decomposed body parts.

That summer, Fa'iz el-Ghusein, an Arab lawyer and a former Ottoman official from Syria, travelled to Diyarbakir. In a book titled "Martyred Armenia," he wrote about the surrounding desolation. A hundred miles north of Damascus, he encountered men and women huddled under tents made from sheets and rugs. He picked up stories of the death marches heading south. Then he began to witness convoys—from a distance they looked like troops marching to battle, but up close he could see that they were devastated crowds, mostly women, barefoot, exhausted. "Whenever one of them lagged behind, a gendarme would beat her with the butt of his rifle, throwing her on her face, till she rose terrified and rejoined her companions," he wrote. "If one lagged from sickness, she was either abandoned, alone in the wilderness, without help or comfort, to be a prey to wild beasts, or a gendarme ended her life by a bullet." At the city of Urfa, there were Ottoman soldiers from Aleppo—an officer with a cannon had "turned the Armenian quarters into a waste place."

On the final approach to Diyarbakir, the landscape grew bleaker still. "We went on amid the mangled forms of the slain," Ghusein recalled. "The same sight met our view on every side; a man lying, his breast pierced by a bullet; a woman torn open by lead; a child sleeping his last sleep beside his mother; a girl in the flower of her age, in a posture which told its own story. Such was our journey until we arrived at a canal, called Kara Pounâr, near Diyarbakir, and here we found a change in the method of murder and savagery. We saw here bodies burned to ashes. God, from whom no secrets are hid, knows how many young men and fair girls, who should have led happy lives together, had been consumed by fire in this ill-omened place. We had expected not to find corpses of the killed near

to the walls of Diyarbakir, but we were mistaken, for we journeyed among the bodies until we entered the city gate.”

Others had similar stories. Süleyman Nazif found that the “smell of rotting corpses permeated the atmosphere.” Responding to a complaint from an Ottoman official in Syria that the rivers were clogged with the dead, Reşid noted, “Those who were killed here are either being thrown into deep deserted caves or, as has been the case for the most part, are being burnt.” Eventually, the Interior Minister wrote with an order: “Bury the deceased lying on the roads, throw their corpses into brooks, lakes, and rivers, and burn their property left behind on the roads.”

Within the city walls, my grandfather’s shop was destroyed, so he worked from home, and people often turned up. There was an Armenian photographer who had been engaged by the Turks to take propaganda pictures; he came to share news, until one day he said he thought that he had seen too much, and soon after he disappeared. There were relatives from Jabakhchour, among them my grandfather’s remaining sister, ill with tuberculosis, who left him a two-year-old girl. There was a woman whose husband had been murdered, and an underfed Armenian soldier—“a man, very nice, and pathetic, if you need him,” a priest from Sourp Giragos said, my aunt, who knew the story, recalled. More and more people came, perhaps as many as thirty, and hid in a charcoal pit, behind piles of wood, in an underground tunnel.

The mufti’s son, Şeref, also came; people were bringing him orphaned boys, my aunt recalled, and he told my grandfather, “Let me give one or two to you.” He brought a teen-ager from Bitlis named Kapriel. “My father began asking around, trying to find his father, looking in the newspaper, even contacting the Armenian cathedral in Istanbul,” my aunt said. “There was news of someone who met Kapriel’s father’s description. Kapriel wanted to go, and my father arranged for his travel. By the time Kapriel got there, his father was dead for two days.”

My grandfather had created a sanctuary, but it was not invulnerable. Once,

my father told me, a high-ranking police officer came to visit my grandfather. My grandmother brought food, and my grandfather, who had a habit of quietly nudging plates in the direction of guests, sat waiting. The officer ate and, when he was done, began to speak. He had been walking on the riverbank when he saw an Armenian woman my grandfather knew, who was about to be raped; to spare her from misery, he had shot her. My grandfather, unable to control his anger, kicked the officer out, and the officer vowed that by morning the family would be put on the caravans: a death sentence. (In my uncle’s version, the source of the argument differs, but not the outcome.) My grandmother’s father, Ke-vork, said that he would bolt the door, douse the house with gasoline, and destroy the family rather than surrender. A sleepless night followed; at dawn, the muezzin at the mosque called out. The streets were quiet. My grandfather turned to one of the people in his house, an Armenian man who passed as a Kurd in public. “Go to the mosque,” he said, “and tell us what is happening.” The scout went, and found a funeral in progress. The police officer had died shortly after leaving, of a heart attack. On the way back, the scout broke cover, calling out in Armenian, “The man is dead!” My grandfather went to see for himself, mixing among the mourners, nodding, saying, “A good man.”

After planting the roses, Ara Sarafian wanted to travel south, to the banks of the Tigris, where Reşid had conspired with Kurds to attack the keleks. In an old diplomatic report, he had found references to the location, and on a previous visit he had gone looking for it. The report was off by several miles, it turned out, but villagers corrected him. “Kurds have an everyday memory of Armenians, whether it is a particular house or a building or a field,” he said in the car. “The memory is still there.”

Sarafian didn’t know the way, but at a courthouse we found someone who could guide us: İkrām Sevīm, a law clerk, tall and thin, in a checkered

blazer. As we drove past a village built on an Armenian graveyard, Sevīm spoke of 1915: “The Armenians taken away were saying, ‘We have animals up on the mountain, and if you don’t milk them then the animals will suffer.’ We didn’t say anything. They were looking after their animals, and we were not looking after them.”

Ten minutes later, we were in empty hills, the grass vibrant. A sign marked a military outpost: “Special Security Zone—Entrance Forbidden.” Sevīm drove briskly past, turning right, then left, until the paved road gave way to a network of rutted tracks. Stones on the road grew larger and sharper. Fearing that they would puncture his tires, Sevīm did not want to proceed. But we went on in Sarafian’s car, driving no faster than a stroll, while a few of us, in front of the vehicle, chucked large rocks out of the way. Still, it was evident that we wouldn’t reach the ravine before nightfall.

The sky faded to the color of slate. Looking at a jagged hilltop before us—a scrim blocking the river—I thought of a moment in the Armenian liturgy when the priests step behind a curtain to prepare the Eucharist. On the other side, churchgoers can hear chants and singing, but the ritual is obscured, in a symbol of faith. Had we made it to the other side of the outcropping, what would we have seen? The Tigris flowing, as always, with no hint of the violent history attached to that spot.

As we carefully turned around, I decided that where we stood was as good as anywhere. Then someone made a joke about the military outpost and what we might say if we were stopped—the truth would raise too many suspicions—

and I realized that I was only concocting a justification for failing to reach a place of real importance. There is, perhaps, an element of contrivance in any pilgrimage—the idea that arriving at a far-off destination will be personally transformative. But we were not attempting a pilgrimage in the conventional sense. We were hoping to transform our *destination*, to employ our presence as witnesses, even if a century



too late, to raise it out of officially imposed obscurity.

In the car, Sarafian mentioned that he was planning an event in Diyarbakir the following day, and then he had to rush to Paris for an academic conference. But he intended to return. A dam was being built downstream, he said, and by the time it was finished the site would be flooded, its erasure complete. Local memory of the event was also vanishing. During his earlier trip, he had met an eighty-three-year-old village leader named Hussein Karakuş, whose uncle had participated in the slaughter at the ravine. The story of the keleks had been told and retold in his family, and Sarafian, with his phone, recorded Karakuş as he relayed what he knew: the Armenians had been sent down the river from Diyarbakir by keleks on the *vali's* order, and they "were all killed and burned." When Sarafian asked if there had been any Armenians in the area, the man began to list dozens of villages—Keferzo, Bazboot, Deri, Tmiz, Baraso—that had been emptied of inhabitants. "They were all massacred," he said, and added, "It was a sin." Sarafian promised to return, but Karakuş died shortly after their meeting, taking with him whatever else he knew.

On the road back to Diyarbakir, I dozed, then awoke. Rain hit the window in diagonals. My thoughts turned to my grandfather. The more I learned about his survival, the more precarious it seemed. Most of the survivor stories I had heard from Armenians in Diyarbakir were of children— orphaned, or spared with their mothers—who were taken in by Turks or Kurds. My grandfather had survived as an adult, relatively openly, sheltering other Armenians in a way that doesn't seem to have been completely disguised.

Perhaps he was not prominent enough to be put on the keleks and robbed, as the city's wealthiest Armenians were. But he had not been deported and killed on a roadside, either. Certainly, he had useful skills. In a telegram, Reşid reported that two hundred Armenian craftsmen had been allowed to remain in the province, because they were valuable to the military. My grandfather, as far as I was able to learn, never



In the countryside, Kurds have passed down memories of their part in the killings. One said,

made things for the Army. But my father and his siblings say that he provided Western garments to members of the city's Kurdish and Turkish elite, even as they were planning the massacres. In essence, he was bartering for his life.

There is a story that all my grandfather's living children recall: as the

killings and deportations were winding down, he received an unwanted invitation from the *vali* himself. He was brought before him, and the *vali* asked, Why are you still alive? When my grandfather explained that he was a master tailor, someone produced a bolt of fabric. Make me a coat, the *vali* said. My grandfather saw that there was not



"The Armenians taken away were saying, 'We have animals up on the mountain, and if you don't milk them the animals will suffer.'"

enough fabric, but, realizing that he could not refuse, he took it home and proclaimed that the family would live or die by this coat. He worked desperately. When the coat was finished, he brought it to the *vali*, who tried it on and said that it was good—but then, just as my grandfather was leaving, the *vali* called out, "Wait! I would like these

buttons to be covered in fabric, too." My grandparents struggled to cover the buttons, using whatever scraps were left. Then my grandfather returned with the coat, and he was spared.

The story has the contours of a parable; some details may have been burnished in the retelling. But on the whole it appears to match the historical re-

cord. As a young revolutionary, Reşid was arrested by the sultan's men, and in his memoirs he gave special attention to the treatment of his clothes, bemoaning their confiscation and mocking their replacements: "a fez on my head that was rather narrow and too long" and "a pair of pants that still sagged even though I had folded the

waist three times (they must have been tailored for one of the palace eunuchs).” Reşid understood from experience how small indignities could be used as an instrument of persecution.

A historian who spent years studying the extirpation of Diyarbakir’s Armenians told me, “It is highly unlikely that anybody not entirely reliable was ever allowed to get close to Reşid and take his measurements.” Ghusein, the author of “Martyred Armenia,” recalled that Reşid retained a few Armenian craftsmen in Diyarbakir, but he suggested that there were other forms of patronage, too. “The last family deported from Diyarbakir was that of Dunjian, about November, 1915,” he wrote. “This family was protected by certain Notables.” Our family, it seems, was the same.

My grandfather knew mufti İbrahim and the members of his clan, prominent local Kurds who belonged to Reşid’s inner circle. In particular, he associated with the mufti’s son, Şeref—a man one diplomat listed as No. 12 under “Persons Responsible for the Armenian Massacres in the Vilayet of Diyarbakir.” From conversations with my father, I came to regard their relationship as a matter of cold convenience. After the war, Şeref often visited the family home, and my father told me that pleasantries were exchanged, that children were expected to kiss his hand, and that my grandfather often muttered a mild curse after he left. But not long ago my mother found an old tape of my father’s eldest living sister, Ani, interviewed by my parents, and she talked with my father about Şeref:

ANI: He was a kind man.

PUZANT: He was not that kind.

ANI: Yes, Father did say that from appearances he seemed kind, but if the opportunity arose he was still a Turk.

PUZANT: He wasn’t that good. He was a very bad man, but among bad men he was good.

ANI: He didn’t do anything bad to my father.

My aunt was the second daughter in the family to be named Ani. In 1915, at the height of the genocide, my grandmother gave birth to her first child, and named her Ani, but she died young. The next child, born in 1916, inherited her name. “I asked my father, ‘How did I get my name?’” my aunt said on the tape. “And he told me it was given by

Şeref bey, who said, ‘You know, your people are fighting at the front, and it’s possible that you might get the Kars-Ardahan provinces back, and also the ancient city of Ani, so you should call your daughter Ani.’ And so when Ani died the name was left for me.”

This is not cold convenience. Perhaps it is impossible to fully grasp the mixture of friendship and animosity, suspicion and mistrust between my grandfather and the mufti’s son—the



complexities of a relationship that transcended not only communal and religious differences but also the rift of genocide. In 1915, Şeref had a secret knock for my grandfather’s door, and on at least one occasion warned him that the house was under suspicion as a sanctuary. My grandfather sent away the people who were hiding there, some of the men disguised in women’s veils. Searchers came with dogs, but found nothing. Why Şeref decided to help, risking his own life, is hard to know. Just before leaving Diyarbakir, my grandfather asked him. Şeref said, “The Russians were advancing. They had reached as far as Erzerum. Had they made it to Diyarbakir, then I would have been like you. In that case, you would have protected me.”

As it turned out, Şeref’s fears were misplaced. In Diyarbakir, many people involved in the genocide remained prominent in local life. Şeref became mayor. Another member of his clan, who had been key to the genocidal program, entered parliament. And the *vali*? He was unrepentant. The C.U.P. party secretary recalled saying to him later, “You are a doctor. And, being a doctor, you are charged with saving lives, so how is it that you let so many innocent people go to their death?” Reşid described a condition of existential threat: “I saw that my country was going to be lost. So, eyes closed, I pushed on

ahead without fear, convinced it was for the good of my nation.” A bit later, he added, “You asked me how, being a doctor, I could have taken a life. Well, here is my answer: Those Armenian bandits were a bunch of harmful microbes pestering the body of this nation. A doctor’s duty is to kill microbes, isn’t it?”

Reşid was ready to be judged, he boasted: “If, because of my actions, my own country’s history holds me responsible, then so be it.” At the war’s end, in 1918, he was arrested, and prosecuted by an Ottoman tribunal, which operated briefly under foreign pressure. But he fled detention, and while the authorities tried to hunt him down he wrote a rambling letter to his wife. “The Armenian hounds have joined them,” he said. Friends advised him to turn himself in, but he chastised them. “I feel the result will be dark. I am thinking of committing suicide.” He armed himself with a revolver, and in February, 1919, he killed himself. His family was granted a state stipend—for “services to the fatherland”—and, in time, Turkish society came to honor him: a street in central Ankara still bears his name.

After the war, my grandfather strove to navigate a city that remained in turmoil. In 1925, a Kurdish rebellion was crushed, its leaders executed by hanging in the city center. Four years later, my grandfather said, of his eldest daughters, “These girls have to leave.” He smuggled them and one of his sons to Aleppo. He, too, was desperate to go. At one point, he sold his house and all his belongings, and moved the family into a small apartment, waiting for permits that would allow them to leave. But the permits never came. There were other attempts, also unsuccessful. My aunt told me that a friend of his, a Turkish official, looked up his records and told him that he would never get permission: “You are supposed to stay here and work.” The city’s entrepreneurial class had been wiped out.

My grandfather went into business with one of the “notables,” a prominent member of the clan that had helped protect him. He also opened a sesame-oil factory, and he did well. In his quiet way, he continued to help people; my Aunt Ani said he was an

“anonymous philanthropist,” adding, “Everyone called him *dayi*”—uncle. But, outside his family, I sense, he kept himself at some remove. In his home, he permitted only Armenian to be spoken, and yet he forbade himself and his family to speak it on the streets. Though he liked to wear expensive clothes, he always had his children trample on them before he went out. Conspicuousness was still a risk. When he learned that another of his sons was secretly planning to go, he helped him. One of his daughters visited from Aleppo; he brought her a Ramadan sweet wrapped in paper and told her that if she could guess what it was he would give her anything. When she guessed correctly, she asked to take one of her brothers with her, and he obliged.

Even as his family emigrated in waves, my grandfather prospered, moving closer to the Great Mosque (and farther from the Infidel District). By the time my father was born, in 1936, he had built a grand house, with a stable facing the avenue, a courtyard, and a flat roof in the Diyarbakir style. In those years, during the intense Anatolian summer heat, just about the entire city would retreat to the rooftops at night, to wooden daybeds open to the night sky. My grandfather’s house had them, too. But my family’s stories of life in that house give the sense that a century of modernity moved there at an accelerated pace. My father recalls going from meals on a carpet, in the Near Eastern style, to Western dining, with table, chairs, and china; my grandmother returning from Aleppo with nylons. There was a new camera, and a small darkroom to go with it.

In an old suitcase crammed with pictures, I found a photo taken in that house; on the back, my mother had written, “circa 1950.” My grandfather, near seventy, is at the center: hair short, neatly combed, pure white; tie in a crisp knot. He is surrounded by thirty people, pressed tightly together. Looking at that picture, it is possible to see that the house was intended to accommodate generations, and yet, only a year or two later, my grandfather would abandon it: a train for Syria, forged papers, a ship for Beirut.

In exile, he succumbed to a medley of ailments: prostate surgery, a leg lost

to gangrene, gathering isolation. He lived to see one son die in a car accident and another shot while standing on the balcony—a stray bullet from one of Beirut’s warring factions proving fatal. My grandfather spent his final years bedridden in his Beirut apartment. The family’s money was nearly gone; his last words to my father, who left for America in 1958, were a request for a wooden leg. Death arrived before the request could be fulfilled. He was buried in an unmarked grave.

My father had told me his childhood address, 2 Çiçek Street, and before leaving Diyarbakir I went to search for it. In a narrow cobblestoned alley, I found the number sloppily painted on an apartment building made of brick, crumbling mortar, and rebar. The street was about the width of a man standing with arms stretched apart, and the buildings were covered in graffiti honoring the P.K.K. Kurdish children

played unattended. Since 1990, countless villages had been razed, and the villagers who came to Diyarbakir had put up buildings rapidly to exploit legal loopholes. The buildings were called *gecekondur*, Demirbaş told me, meaning “built in the night.” The structure at 2 Çiçek Street looked to me like a variant of *gecekondur*, and I imagined that in ten years it, too, would be torn down and replaced. The only discernible remnant of our family house was a heavy stone that once served as a threshold.

III. REMEMBRANCE

State-sponsored denial is not a void, a simple absence of truth; it is a wounding instrument. And, after a hundred years of it, it is hard to feel Armenian in a meaningful way without defining oneself in opposition to it. But the centenary of the genocide, in 2015, may be more than just an occasion for



“For someone who believes in personal responsibility, you spend a lot of time blaming government.”

reflection. Some anniversaries offer the promise of release, and the historical distance, combined with the changes unfolding in liberal Turkish society, may be significant. "This government has an unusual aspect to it," Demirbaş told me, sitting in Sourp Giragos's courtyard. "It punishes us, but it also implements our projects. I was dismissed as mayor for providing multilingual municipal services, but then the state started multilingual TV programming." As we spoke, a reporter rushed over to ask if anyone had heard about Erdoğan's "apology" for 1915. As it turned out, Erdoğan did not apologize. He offered a perplexing statement—sympathetic in tone but in its substance still consistent with the official denial. He said, "It is a duty of humanity to acknowledge that Armenians remember the suffering of that period, just like every other citizen of the Ottoman empire." A week later, he argued in an interview that the genocide never happened, echoing a sentiment that he expressed before the reconstruction of the cathedral: "If there is a crime, then

those who committed it can offer an apology. My nation, my country, has no such issue."

On April 24th, the Day of Remembrance, I went to Sourp Giragos early in the morning to see who would turn up. The church door was padlocked, but a few people arrived and sat down for tea. There was a man from Istanbul who spoke about his grandfather, who had owned three-quarters of a village nearby. The man asked if the church had kept land registers; it had, but most of them had long since disappeared. Five or six years ago, he said, he had told a lawyer friend that he wanted to sue the state to reclaim his family's land, but the lawyer advised against it: two families who sued had disappeared. "Things are changing," someone said. "Yes," the man said. "But if you have a hundred years' worth of fear in you, it's hard to change from one day to the next."

While he was talking, another man arrived and sat down, a man in his forties or fifties, with dark hair, a thick mustache, a sad and uncertain bearing. Later, someone told me that his name

was Abbas Ercan. In a deep voice, he poured out a flood of loosely consecutive memories. His grandfather had survived the massacres, he began to say, but just as he began to speak he had to stop, and, after a small gasp, he wept. A woman at the table comforted him: Yes, yes, she said, we have all cried over things like this. Ercan resumed his story, about how his grandfather and great-aunt had been orphaned, how they were taken in by neighbors, how they earned money cleaning wool, working a loom, dyeing cloth. But, as he continued, it became clear that the source of all that emotion was not so much the difficulty of surviving 1915 but the difficulty of surviving the denial. Decades later, he said, during the Second World War, his grandfather—a Muslim convert named Ahmet—was bathing alone in a river when some people stumbled upon him and asked, "What are you doing?" Ahmet explained that he was performing Muslim ablutions, but the visitors took one look at him and said, "No, no, we know who you are"—by which they meant that they knew he



was Armenian. Ahmet was overcome with terror, thinking, Oh, God, they're going to eliminate me right now.

Ercan began to choke up again, but he continued, explaining that the people who had found Ahmet understood his fear. They told him, "We are like you," meaning they were also Armenian, and they all promised to stay in touch, but they never did.

Ercan emphasized that he held no grudge against anyone, that he simply had come that morning to do something he could not do for most of his life: to speak about who he was and about his family's experience. I could see that for this man April 24th was not so much about commemorating the past as it was about finding some release from the present. He was likely Muslim, but for him Sourp Giragos was an enclave beyond the denial. "Every morning, my grandfather, without exception, would go and pray at the mosque, even if he was the only person there," Ercan said. "What he was probably doing was saying to himself, 'If something like this ever happens again, I want the community to say, "No, no, no, Ahmet was a good Muslim—even if he is a convert, he is a good Muslim, anyway."'" So they wouldn't hurt him. I am not exactly sure how much he believed." Someone said that this was a common trait among converts, that they become zealous to demonstrate their faith. "They figure something would happen to them if they talked," Ercan added. "But we don't hold a grudge," he said again. "We only want one thing: when we meet someone who has been through all this, we want to console one another."

That evening, Ara Sarafian wanted to visit the ruins of another, far older church, called Sourp Sarkis. It was a short walk, but we got lost, taking one turn, then another, through narrow alleys where old women sat on doorsteps.

"Do you know where the old church is?"

"The mosque?"

"No, the church. It's a ruin."

Eventually, we found the church compound. The gate was locked, so I followed Sarafian through a hole in the outer wall. Inside, a family had improvised a simple house beside the

ruin. Across the entrance, they had strung up a nylon rope for laundry. The scene reminded me of what Sourp Giragos had looked like years ago. The roof had collapsed, but a network of stone arches supported by pillars remained. Because the church had been used to store rice, a third of it had been walled off in cinder block. Dirt and grass filled the basilica, pretty much wall to wall. The floor appeared to undulate like sea swells, with the fallen basalt rocks floating among them. As we fanned out, a freckled Kurdish woman emerged from the house with her children. Sarafian spoke with her. She was in her twenties. Her husband was in prison.

Like Sourp Giragos, this church had endured cycles of collapse and rebirth: in 1915, a treasured relic—a fragment of a nail, supposedly among those hammered into Jesus' Cross—went missing. "This is the reality of the Armenian genocide," Sarafian said. "Sourp Giragos represents a future wish." He studied the fallen architecture, and then left, making his way back through the hole in the wall. I decided to linger. Four generations ago—decades before my grandfather was born—a member of my grandmother's family, Sarkis Kazanjian, had been at that church, helping to renovate it. He is the earliest identifiable person in our family tree; beyond him, our ties to Diyarbakir vanish into black earth.

As I walked across the ruins, it occurred to me that, though Kazanjian had not lived to see 1915, he had been touched by it, too. This is one of the strange features of genocide denial and of Turkification: erasure, by design, works both forward and backward in time. My grandfather had preserved the future for his family. But his past, our past, whatever contributions we had made to Ottoman society, had been effectively eradicated. I had been travelling with family photos, showing them to people, and the photo of Kazanjian always evoked the strongest reaction. The picture is of a broad-shouldered man with intense eyes, wearing a fez, vest, coat, and embroidered caftan. Kazanjian was a merchant, apparently also with a role in officialdom. A Kurdish intellectual, a good friend of Hrant Dink, wept when she saw it,

and when I asked her why, she didn't answer. I could speculate. There was no way to look at such a man and believe that he belonged to any other part of the world, and yet it was also obvious that in Turkey, whatever progress had been made in the past century, this man, and many others like him, could not be offered acceptance without painful complications.

As a boy working to restore the church, Kazanjian had caught his hand between two stones and lost a finger. If you knew the right piece of basalt, you could reach out and touch it, but there was no way to know. My aunt said the finger had been buried beneath one of the altars: he had lost it in an act of piety, and it was given a pious resting place. The story had its uncertainties, but memory—kept alive now by only a few—was all that was left.

I went farther into the church, making a list of the things that the people of Diyarbakir had left there. Dried scraps of bread. Automotive carpeting. An old shoe. A fragment of a transistor radio. Corrugated plastic, some of it burned. Where the main altar had been, there was a fire pit; among the ashes, a wrapper for a candy called Coco Fino and empty cans of Efes beer. A rusted wire. Coils of shit. In the inset of a wall, someone had arranged several stones in a neat line. Hundreds of daisies reached upward. And as the sun descended behind the high city walls the smell of grilled meat drifted over from nearby homes, and the sound of children playing began to fill the streets. A ball was kicked and it hit the side of a building and bounced. Some boys clambered over the wall that surrounded the church. Women left their kitchens, and climbed to their roofs to collect carpets that had been put out to air. TVs wired to satellite dishes came on, filling spare rooms with their ethereal glow. All of Diyarbakir, it seemed, except the church, drifted forward in time. Overhead, a flock of common swifts darted and circled among the old stone arches. Their black wings arced like boomerangs as they swooped through the ruins—above the piles of earth, the weeds and the wildflowers, all the trash—and their movements were ceaseless, careless, as if unweighted by anything. ♦



The landline was mewling again in the kitchen, obliging Pell Munnelly, woke now for good, to climb from the cozy rut of her bed and pad downstairs in bare feet. She skimmed her fingertips along the dulled gray-and-lilac grain of the walls, swatted each light switch she passed to feel less alone.

On the phone was the secretary from her little brother Gerry's school. The secretary was named Lorna Dawes, a pretty blond sap Pell sometimes saw around town. Another fight, Sap said: Gerry and two lads in the basement locker rooms before first class, an argument escalating to blows, and now Gerry was being detained in Sap's office until such time as someone could come pick him up.

The receiver was hot against Pell's ear. There was snow in the back garden, a radiant pelt of the stuff with dark, snub-bodied birds dabbing across it. She lifted a foot from the lino, pressed dorsal and toes into the flannelled warmth of her standing calf.

"Hello?" Sap said.

"Well, guess that'd be me," Pell said.

Upstairs, she raked sleep knots and static electricity from her hair. She threw on three layers and an old combat jacket of Nick's, salvaged a knitted hat malodorous with scalp sweat from the boiler room, and slammed the front door. The snow in the concrete courtyard was still faintly cut with the tread-mark arcs of Nick's departed Vectra. Nick lived here in as small a way as he could. He was gone by first light and did not come back until near midnight. But he was the eldest, twenty-five and the state-sanctioned boss ever since the folks died off of cancer over consecutive summers, the mammy three years back, the daddy the year before last. Pell rang Nick on her mobile, counted to eight while the line rang out as she knew it would, sent a text. Then a second, more considered text: said not to worry, she'd bail the lump out herself.

Transport was a problem. Pell's breath smoked in the air. A horse, a runty juvenile skewbald, gawped at her from the field next to the house and flicked its filthy tail.

"You are no candidate," Pell said.

A field farther on was Swanlon's bungalow, the Munnellys' nearest neighbor. Pell discerned a bloom of chimney smoke, faint as a watermark against the white

sky. Swanlon was a pensioner with a metal hip, his only earthly companion the rowdy black bitch of a Border collie he doted upon. Pell knew she could sweet-talk Swanlon into giving her a lift, though he would insist on bringing the dog, which he permitted to ride in passenger, having successfully conditioned the beast to wear a seat belt. But Pell knew that driving had become a fretful ordeal for the old man. Besides, Gerry would go spare if Swanlon's rusting wreck of a car, parping cloudlets of straw and dung out the exhaust, came up the school drive to collect him.

So Pell walked the quarter mile out to the main road. Town was seven miles away. She skirted the barbed spokes of the briars clustered along the road's verge. Across the fields, a row of pylons curved away into the haze. After a while, she heard a vehicle, turned to see a county bus approaching. She stepped into the middle of the road and started waving. The bus heaved to a halt. The driver, Mac Reddin, tut-tutted as Pell stamped her boots in the stairwell and thumbed her mam's expired bus pass from her wallet.

"You look like a cooked prawn, Pell," Reddin said.

There were three elderly women on board. They smelled like the inside of kettles in need of descaling. Pell sat away from them. The warm bus wended through the countryside and Pell drowsed in her seat, her drooping forehead scuffing the wet window and starting her back awake.

In Swinford, Pell watched a skinny dark girl in a leather jacket and wool hat bunch an infant to her chest and attempt to collapse, one-handed, an uncollapsing stroller before tossing the thing, splayed and sideways, into the bus's undercompartment.

In Foxford, three lads got on, schoolboys. Pell was sixteen, and they were about the same. They shambled down the aisle, jackets open and school ties wrenched loose, at this hour brazenly on the doss. Boys interested Pell. They were what she missed most about school, watching them and being among them. She liked their creaturely excitability, their insistence, in one another's company, on shouting almost everything, almost all the time. She liked their unwieldy bodies—their hands like hammers

and their loaflike feet, the way their Adam's apples beat like the chests of trapped birds when they talked at her. *At*, not *to*. Pell had already deciphered the difference: most lads were too afraid to talk to her, and instead just blustered into her vicinity.

There were also the boys who barely spoke at all, and these were the ones Pell liked best; the lads who were lean, with long arms and intricately veined wrists, who could stand to inhabit a silence for three seconds in a row. Steven Tallis, the lad at the rear of this pack, was such a specimen. A comely six-foot string of piss, faintly stooped, with shale eyes darting beneath a matted heap of curly black fringe. He shied from looking her way, of course. In the middle was one of the Bruitt boys, the scanty lichen of an unthriving mustache clinging to his lip. Paddy Guthrie, out in front, was stubby and pink and loudly yammering without looking at the two in tow. He was the ringleader, the smart-mouth.

They passed her and slung themselves into seats a few rows behind. There was an interval of scuffling noises, snickering, a distinctly aired *cunt* or *bollocks* or *shudafagup*, followed by a bout of intensive communal muttering. Then a shunt and a rattle as a body cannoned into the frame of the seat immediately behind Pell's.

"Hey. Hey, you." It was Guthrie. Pell smelled beer on his breath.

"Hey," he said again.

"What?" Pell said.

"You're Nicky Munnelly's sister, yeah?" Pell nodded.

"And Gerry, Gerry's sister, yeah?"

"Uh-huh."

"Gerry's all right, isn't he, a header, but good for a laugh in the end," Guthrie said. "And the fella Nick—what used they call him, the Prowler, yeah, back in the day? Me brother Joe came up with him, said he used to torment the priests in there something wicked, broke their hearts every second day. And shagged anything that moved around town." Guthrie's face blinked at her. Pell watched his thin, bright lips pull apart.

"What do you mean, saying that about my brothers?" she said.

"Ah no, I *respect* the *fuck* out of them," Guthrie said. "But, like, they're a line of hellions, the lads out your way, in't they?"

"Lads are clowns," Pell said, and

sighed. "You and your mouth-breathing bum chums included."

Guthrie laughed. "Where you going?" he said.

"Town."

"No shit. Whereabouts and whyfor?"

"Where are you going?" Pell shot back.

"Why aren't you in school?"

"You know Tallis? His ma's away, so we were back in his place. There's all this drink in the shed. The generous mare don't mind us having a couple the odd weekend, but we sneak a few extra now and then on the sly, in between, like this morning." He licked his lips again. "Bit of a buzz on, and now we're, well, we're heading back to school for the afternoon. Dossing gets boring, you know, trying to come up with stuff to actually fuck-ing do."

"You were on the doss, and now you're heading back into school?" Pell said.

"Correct," Guthrie said. "For P.E. and art class. Handy numbers. Ginty, the art teacher, lets us listen to whatever we want on our iPods, long as we agree to 'draw our feelings.' A soft goon but an all-right one, Ginty. But, hey, you still out of school yourself like?"

Pell shrugged.

"Well for some, eh? You ever going to go back?"

The bus was in town now. Farther along the quays, set behind a stone wall and a tree line, was the boys' school. Pell

could see the slated peaks of the main building emerging from the crowns of the trees.

"It's where I'm headed right now," Pell said, smiling, already bored with Guthrie.

Nick Munnelly was standing in an alley in the cold at the rear of the Bay Pearl hotel, smoking and picking at the threads, the linty specks, snarled in the hairs of his forearm. It was something to do. Against the opposite wall of the alley was a dumpster brimming with bin bags. On the cobbled ground were crushed Styrofoam cups, plastic baggeens, and shreds of newspaper so snow-sodden they did not stir in the wind. Nick cuffed a boot heel against the doorway's concrete step. The side of his face was rashing into numbness. He was in a T-shirt and a spattered apron. He worked in the hotel kitchen, a muggy, febrile space where the staff sweated through shifts stripped to single layers. The other smokers took their breaks inside, huddled beneath the grille of a ventilation shaft in an old storage room. Nick preferred the open alley, with its ripe rankness and keening draft. The cold was a pleasure to him because he could absent himself from its effects at any moment. But not yet: the true pleasure of relief, like any pleasure, was in its anticipation. Being able to go inside af-

terward would be better than having stayed inside in the first place.

Sean the Chinaman poked his head out the door.

"Jaysus, lad, it's nippy," Sean said.

Nick said nothing.

"Your kids are here."

Nick looked at Sean.

"Boy and a girl?"

"Yeah," Sean said. "A boy and a girl."

Sean's actual name was Heng Tao Chen. He changed it because Irish people couldn't handle the pronunciation. This mildly incensed Nick. Any grown human who couldn't manage Heng, just Heng, after a few sincere attempts was being a purposefully ignorant fuck. Nick tried to explain this to Sean, but Sean, diplomatic as the woefully outnumbered must always be, said that he was happy to go with Sean. It was what some people did when they came over, he said, picked a native name. A Chinaman called Sean. It was funny, Nick thought, sly on Heng's part.

"Nick?"

Nick shook his head and smiled. "That's my bro and sis, you daft cunt. What age do I look?"

They were in the lounge, weather dripping from their jackets onto the shitty carpet. It needed replacing, but so did everything. The hotel was dying on its hole. Nick told them to sit, and they each took a leather chair by the street window. The chairs were too big for them, the leather creaky with disuse. Gerry climbed into his head first, pausing on his hands and knees like a dog before righting himself in the squeaking seat. He had a gunked lip, a yellow plume on his cheek, a nostril rimmed with crust-ing red.

Nick looked at his little brother. "Stop being a fucking prick," he said.

Gerry slumped down. Nick saw that he was dazed. The adrenaline churned up by the fight had all ebbed away. Nick remembered the feeling, the rinsed muscles, the warm quiver of shot nerves. There was no point interrogating Gerry as to what had happened, or why. It didn't matter. Someday, someone was going to beat sense into the little snot, and Nick knew only that it was not going to be him.

"I was flat out here," Nick said.

Pell dabbed at her wet nose with the



"I'm packing heat—and my dental records, just in case."

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cuff of her, no—it was Nick’s combat jacket.

“I know,” she said.

“You know what I’m like with the fucking phone. But next time give them my number.”

“You’re not going to answer.”

“No. But let that be those cunts’ problem. That’s what they’re paid for.”

Nick glanced at the bar clock.

“Sean, be a doll and get the kitchen to fix this pair—what you want? Chips, burgers?”

“Curry chips and a quarter-pounder with cheese,” Gerry said immediately.

“Pell?”

Pell was looking out the window.

“The same.”

“My lunch ain’t due till three, but I can probably clear out before that,” Nick said. “Eat that shit first and I’ll drop you home.”

Nick went back through the kitchen and out again into the alley. There had been a minute left on his smoke break, and, with the sensation of tears boiling behind his eyes, he smoked that minute out.

“Bambi on ice,” Nick said. He was driving, Pell in passenger. Gerry was in back, asleep, or feigning it. All the morning’s excitability over, the little wanker was enjoying the bonus of having the afternoon off and the additional impending idleness of however many days of suspension the school decided to deal down. Pell was brooding, chin tucked into her shoulder, eyes fixed out her window.

On the way to the car, she’d stepped off the pavement and gone down on her arse on the ice. Gerry, in his post-scrap stupor, had come to life, clapping and chanting, “Get up, Pell, get up, Pell,” as she rocked back and forth. Nick had let this performance go for thirty seconds before lifting a boot and glancing Gerry’s knee, sending him clattering against the bonnet of a nearby car. Nick had not offered Pell a hand, because Pell would not have taken an offered hand. Instead, he’d grabbed her under her armpits and hauled her to her feet. “Leggo,” she’d growled.

Nick watched the road. It was dis-

orienting to be away from work at this hour. The afternoon sky was swamped with clouds, and the glare made the linings of his eyelids ache, all that dazzle piled to the low brink of the horizon.

“Bambi on ice,” he said again.

Pell acted tough. She was a bunched slip of a thing with a mouth that got vicious real fast. With her hackles up, she was liable to go for anyone. Whenever she came out with an exceptionally cutting remark, Nick wanted to take her in his arms and tell her, *Your mammy and your daddy would be so proud.*

“Don’t be sulking, Bambi,” Nick said, laughing, and went to pet her brow.

“Prick off,” Pell said, and swung at his shoulder.

Without taking his eyes off the road, Nick grabbed her wrist and turned her limb toward her until he had Pell’s head pinned to the passenger window. Pell had a tiny fucking head for a sixteen-year-old human, Nick thought, and laughed as he felt its diminutive shape vibrate where it was trapped. Her free hand slapped at his braced arm. But up until he relinquished his grip—he wasn’t hurting her—Pell’s jaw remained taut, and she fumed through her nose but said no word, refused to beg to be let go.

He slowed the car to a crawl in the yard, arced around, and, without waiting for the Vectra to come to a stop, the two opened their doors and timed their leaps clear. He completed the circle, watched them in the mirror. He bipped the horn. Neither looked back at him.

Swanlon and his dog were standing at the gate of his house. Swanlon put out a claw, held it there. Nick pulled up.

“How’s young Munnelly?” Swanlon said, his

nostrils plugged with silvery, unkempt hair.

“Sound. You?”

The old man snorted, spat.

“You not in work?”

“Heading straight that way now. Had to drop that pair back.”

“Young Gerry not in school?”

“School’s not an arrangement he’s enthralled with just now.”

“The scholarly burdens,” Swanlon said. “He’s a good lad, but.”

“He is,” Nick said. “When he’s asleep.”

Swanlon grubbed at the springy cartilage of the dog’s ear. He’d inherited the farm from his owl fella, decades back, had worked it here in tandem with his mother until she, too, died off. As far as Nick knew, Swanlon had never gone anywhere or done anything beyond tending to his acres. He was just an ailing, ancient sham who knew almost nothing about life.

“And what about young Pell?” Swanlon continued.

Nick ground his teeth. “What about her?”

“I saw her stalking straight out that road this morning, head up. Looked like a soldier making off to war.”

“That’s how she always looks.”

“She should finish her schooling, too. She’s a sharp tack.”

“I know, I know. But, the way I see it, that’s up to her.”

Pell had been out of school for almost two months now. She’d started junior-cert year right after the da’s funeral. She hadn’t missed a day that Nick could recall, was eerily compliant through the year, then failed every single exam. This year, she was supposed to repeat, but when school started, back in September, she would not get out of bed. Just would not get out of bed. The third day, Nick, sick of appealing, barged into her room, grabbed her by the ankles, and began to walk backward. Pell, on her back, did not resist. She held his gaze and needed three stitches in her head where she’d hit the floor.

“Ah, I know, but still,” Swanlon said. He shifted his gaze. “You up to your eyes in the job?”

“Not particularly,” Nick said.

“You’re hardly about.”

Nick gulled his head. “You keeping tabs?”

Swanlon smiled. “Not in an especial way. But what else have I to be doing?”

Nick looked up at Swanlon. “I don’t know. I couldn’t imagine. There’s not so much as a square inch spare inside my head to ponder what it is you’d have to be doing with your time.”

“All right,” Swanlon said.

Nick angled his arm out the window.



He watched the dog raise its gleaming snout to his palm.

"Do they ever not look repentant?" he said.

Gerry dismounted, hitched his horse to the post outside the Monteroy Saloon, and cycled through his weapons inventory, topping up the ammo in his twin revolvers and his Winchester repeater. The stars were out. Pianola notes drifted from the saloon's double doors. Civilians walked the edges of the wide dirt street with their eyes on their shoes. Cicadas, crickets, whatever they were, ticked way out in the desert dark.

Gerry, the flesh-and-guts boy, was lumped on his beanbag, the only light in his room the glow from the TV atop the dresser. His PlayStation wheezed on the floor at his slippered feet. The game was *Blood Dusk 2*. You played as Cole Skuse, an ex-Yankee soldier and mercenary. Right now, Gerry was about to attempt the rescue of Skuse's love interest, a beautiful blond whore named Dora Levigne. She was being held hostage by the Cullen gang inside the saloon. Mission objective was get in there, ventilate as many of the Cullen boys as possible, and get her out. The Cullen faction was part of a larger horde of roving rapists, murderers, thieves, and scalp hunters led by a scarred brute known only as the Padre. The Padre was your true and final adversary, the man who, in the game's prologue, had ordered the murder of your family.

Gerry liked *Blood Dusk 2*, but was becoming less and less enamored of the repetitious, shootout-intensive missions you were obliged to complete in order to advance the plot. The game weighed things too much in your favor. You had unlimited lives, too many automatic save points, too nuanced and forgiving a targeting system for taking out your opponents. What was worth it, what kept Gerry coming back, was the game map. The map was gorgeous, two hundred square miles of simulated, fully interactive nineteenth-century North American frontier. While the missions tended to cluster in the towns and settlements that occupied only a small percentage of the game's physical environment, Gerry had spent countless hours ranging through the enormous remainder of the



"Just curious: when, exactly, were you planning to tell me that you're the product of a 3-D printer?"

• •

map. He had discovered the remnants of Indian graves, chased down buffalo on an open plain, drunk moonshine with a benignly deranged prospector by the shore of a moonlit creek. The landscape teemed with wildlife and, to a lesser extent, other people, and you could, of course, shoot every living thing in the game, though Gerry refrained whenever possible. At sunset, he would goad his nag up the trail of a hill to watch the sinking rays cut across the cliff walls of a distant canyon, the ponderous flecks of vultures lagging in the thermals, circling something dying unseen on the canyon floor. . . .

"Shhtburk."

"Hah?" Gerry said.

"Shit. Brick," Pell repeated from the doorway, looking down at Gerry. She was in Uggs and sweatpants, holding a glass with a clear liquid in it. Pell liked vodka, liked to lingeringly nurse thimblefuls of the stuff in the evening. Off school, and drinking when she liked: Pell had Nick under her thumb. The funny thing was that Nick, back before the folks croaked, had been mad for drinking, going out, and the general pursuit of hell-raising. Now he'd turned brutally sensible: worked every hour he could, stayed dil-

igently sober, did not even bother with women anymore.

"Yeah?" Gerry said.

"I've made chops. Potatoes and a tiny, tiny little bit of veg, so we don't all get scurvy. Will you have some, please?"

"Not hungry," he said, though he was, but somewhere amid the clutter of his room there was a half-full, party-sized tub of Pringles, likely still perfectly edible, that would do.

"How's the face?"

Gerry shrugged, licked his lips. His saline made the tenderness of his split lip buzz.

"Who'd you set on this time?" Pell said. "Or who was it set on you?"

Keith Timlin. Now, Keith Timlin was a mate, but, like all of Gerry's mates, the friendship was susceptible to these eruptions, and afterward Gerry could never work out whose fault it was, or account for the rapidity with which the mood had escalated from idle chat to banter to mock slagging and then to real, aggressive slagging. But Gerry liked Timlin! Gerry liked Timlin more than most! Certainly more than Shaughnessy, who all of a sudden had waded in on Timlin's side and started sneering about the smell coming off Gerry. It was Shaughnessy

who only a couple of weeks back had been getting reams of slugging mileage out of making fun of Timlin's orthopedic shoe (the "clopper," as Shaughnessy called it) and of Timlin's admittedly ratty-looking features, his pinched snout and poky teeth. Gerry had been the one sticking up for Timlin then.

"Danny Shaughnessy," Gerry said.

"There were two, though; your one Dawes said there was another lad involved. Was the other lad fighting you, too, or sticking up for you, or what?"

"The other lad was with Shaughnessy. They were both against me."

"And did you start it?"

Gerry shrugged.

"I'll take that as a yeah."

Gerry loathed being on exhibit like this, down on his fat arse, Pell looming above him. On the screen, Skuse idled in the street and kicked mindlessly at dirt clods, setting the spurs of his boots chiming. Gerry kept looking at the screen.

"You can't keep at that, Gerry," Pell said. "Being an idiot."

"School is packed with dickheads."

"The world is packed with dickheads," Pell said. "You've got to stop rising to them."

"I will," Gerry said, just to get her to shut up.

"You won't," she replied.

"I will soon."

Gerry said nothing else, just waited until Pell slid from the doorway, then sprang up, banged the door, and returned to his beanbag. He grazed the "X" button with his thumb, and Skuse drew his pistol and braced into a firing stance. He strode into the Monteroy Saloon and blew away everything that moved.

It got late. Gerry found the tub of Pringles and finished them off. The house quietened. Pell didn't bother him again, and Gerry played on. Eventually, he heard a car. From his window, he could see that the yard light had come on. He stood up to look. The door of Nick's Vectra was open, as was the boot. The car, parked at an untidy diagonal to the house, looked abandoned, ambushed. It was empty inside, welling with shadows. The yard light made the snow around the car unnaturally bright. Then his brother ap-

peared, returning from the direction of the house's front door. Gerry watched Nick, still in his white T-shirt and white work trousers, his breath trailing visibly from his mouth. Even the canvas sneakers he was wearing were white. Nick was drawing shopping bags from the boot. He must have been freezing, his shoes soaked. A wince flickered across Gerry's



features as he considered the lengthy detour his older brother would have had to make in order to accommodate so late a run for provisions: the twenty-four-hour petrol station on the Dublin road was the only place open this side of midnight, and it was five miles out the other side of town.

He wished he liked his giant humorless prick of a brother more.

Gerry heard shouts, gunfire, and turned back to the screen. He had forgotten to pause the game, and Skuse was taking hits. Dora LeVigne had long been rescued and returned to the care of her madam, and Gerry, travelling onward from Monteroy to the northern town of Aristo, had meandered into a forested area, where he'd stumbled upon a Cullen encampment set into a treed thicket at the foot of a hill. Gerry had left Skuse crouched behind a wedge of rock in preparation for an assault, but now a number of the Cullen party had maneuvered behind him and were unloading their weapons into Skuse's back. Gerry turned his avatar just in time to take a fatal shot to the torso, and the screen cut to black. In the black, words appeared:

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE?

YES/NO

Gerry growled. The game was so easy, it enraged him to die this cheaply. He felt like throwing the pad through the TV. He closed his eyes and breathed in, heard noises downstairs. He stepped over to the closed door. They were in the kitchen, Nick and Pell. Gerry had figured that Pell was in bed by now, but no, she'd either just gone back down or had been down there all this time. They were talking, though their voices were too faint and muffled to comprehend. Gerry got down onto his knees and pressed his face into the rancid fuzz of the carpet, the better to get his ear up to the half-inch horizontal gap between his door and the

floor. He held his breath but still could not make out what they were saying. Nor could he reliably gauge their tone. He wondered, as all eavesdroppers do, if he was the subject under discussion: wee indolent tubs sitting on his hole upstairs and refusing to come out of his room. It might be something they could laugh about together, at least.

There was a game Gerry liked to play, and he realized that he was playing it now: in his head, the muffled voices of his brother and his sister became the voices of his folks. It helped that he could barely recall what their voices had sounded like. The folks were growing vague to him. Sometimes, in the street, he would break out in a sweat as he registered, in the corner of his eye, the particular lanky stride of a man or the way a woman paused to slip the strap of a bag off her shoulder and rummage around for something, but then he'd look and, with a pang of utter relief, realize that there was no resemblance at all. With his parents safely dead, it was safe to imagine that they were not, and so he imagined descending the stairs, strolling in on not just Pell and Nick but the folks—the daddy unwizened, the mammy unwigged—seated at the kitchen table, grinning and abashed after their long and flagrant absence. They would look at Gerry, and in low, sincere voices he would instantly know as theirs, say, "Sorry for dying, son."

And Gerry would say, "That's O.K." Gladdened, and made generous by their remorse, he would turn to Pell and Nick and say, "Sorry for being an asshole today, lads." And Pell and Nick would say, "That's O.K., Gerry. We're sorry for being assholes, too."

The fibres of the carpet pricked like tiny, finite flames against his face. After a while he had to get up, to relieve the pressure building between his temples. Gerry stood, and, as the blood descended from his head, flurries of bright-yellow and purple spots multiplied in the dark in front of his eyes. Five minutes ago, he had felt exhausted, ripe only for the pillow, but now he was electrically wakeful. He held the pad in his hand and watched the blinking spots fade away. In the dark, on the screen, the question remained.

DO YOU WISH TO CONTINUE? ♦

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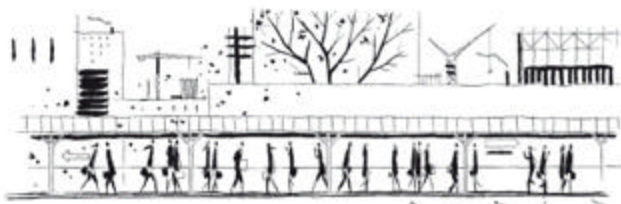
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THE CRITICS



A CRITIC AT LARGE

PULP'S BIG MOMENT

How Emily Brontë met Mickey Spillane.

BY LOUIS MENAND

Back when people had to leave the house if they wanted to buy something, the biggest problem in the book business was bookstores. There were not enough of them. Bookstores were clustered in big cities, and many were really gift shops with a few select volumes for sale. Publishers sold a lot of their product by mail order and through book clubs, distribution systems that provide pretty much the opposite of what most people consider a fun shopping experience—browsing and impulse buying.

Book publishers back then didn't always have much interest in books as such. They were experts at merchandising. They manufactured a certain number of titles every year, advertised them, sold as many copies as possible, and then did it all over the next year. Sometimes a book would be reprinted and sold again. Print runs were modest and so, generally, were profits.

Then, one day, there was a revolution. On June 19, 1939, a man named Robert de Graff launched Pocket Books. It was the first American mass-market-paperback line, and it transformed the industry. Whether it also transformed the country is the tantalizing question that Paula Rabinowitz asks in her lively book *"American Pulp: How Paperbacks Brought Modernism to Main Street"* (Princeton). She builds on a lot of recent scholarship on the way that twentieth-century literature has been shaped by the businesses that make and sell books—work by pioneers in the field, like Janice Radway and Lawrence

Rainey, and, more recently, scholars like Evan Brier, Gregory Barnhisel, and Loren Glass. Paperbacks, even paperbacks that were just reprints of classic texts, turn out to have a key part in the story of modern writing.

Neither the theory nor the practice of mass-market-paperback publishing was original with de Graff. Credit is usually given to an Englishman, Allen Lane, who was the founder of Penguin Books. According to company legend, as Kenneth Davis explains in his indispensable history of the paperback book, *"Two-Bit Culture,"* Lane had his eureka moment while standing in a railway station in Devon, where he had been spending the weekend with the mystery writer Agatha Christie and her husband. He couldn't find anything worthwhile to buy to read on the train back to London. And so, in the summer of 1935, he launched Penguin Books, with ten titles, including *"The Murder on the Links,"* by Agatha Christie. The books sold well right from the start. It helped that Penguin had the whole British Commonwealth, a big chunk of the globe in 1935, as its market.

Paper book covers are almost as old as print. They date back to the sixteenth century, and paperbacking has been the ordinary mode of book production in France, for instance, for centuries. The first edition of James Joyce's *"Ulysses,"* published in Paris in 1922, is a paperback. In the United States, paperback publishing was tried on a major scale at

least twice during the nineteenth century: first, in the eighteen-forties, with an enterprise called the American Library of Useful Knowledge, and after the Civil War, when, unfettered by international copyright agreements, American publishers brought out cheap editions of popular European novels.

The key to Lane's and de Graff's innovation was not the format. It was the method of distribution. More than a hundred and eighty million books were printed in the United States in 1939, the year de Graff introduced Pocket Books, but there were only twenty-eight hundred bookstores to sell them in. There were, however, more than seven thousand newsstands, eighteen thousand cigar stores, fifty-eight thousand drugstores, and sixty-two thousand lunch counters—not to mention train and bus stations. De Graff saw that there was no reason you couldn't sell books in those places as easily as in a bookstore.

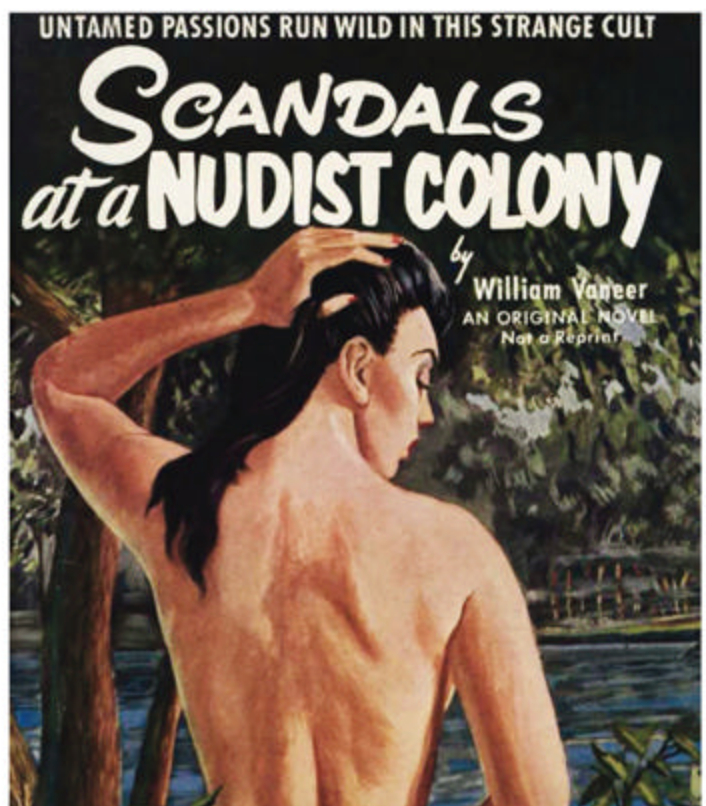
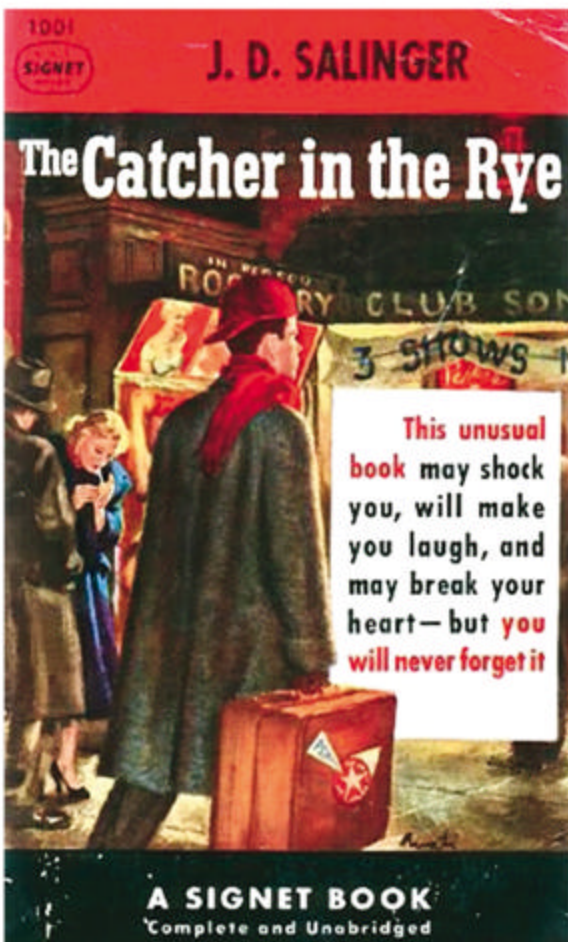
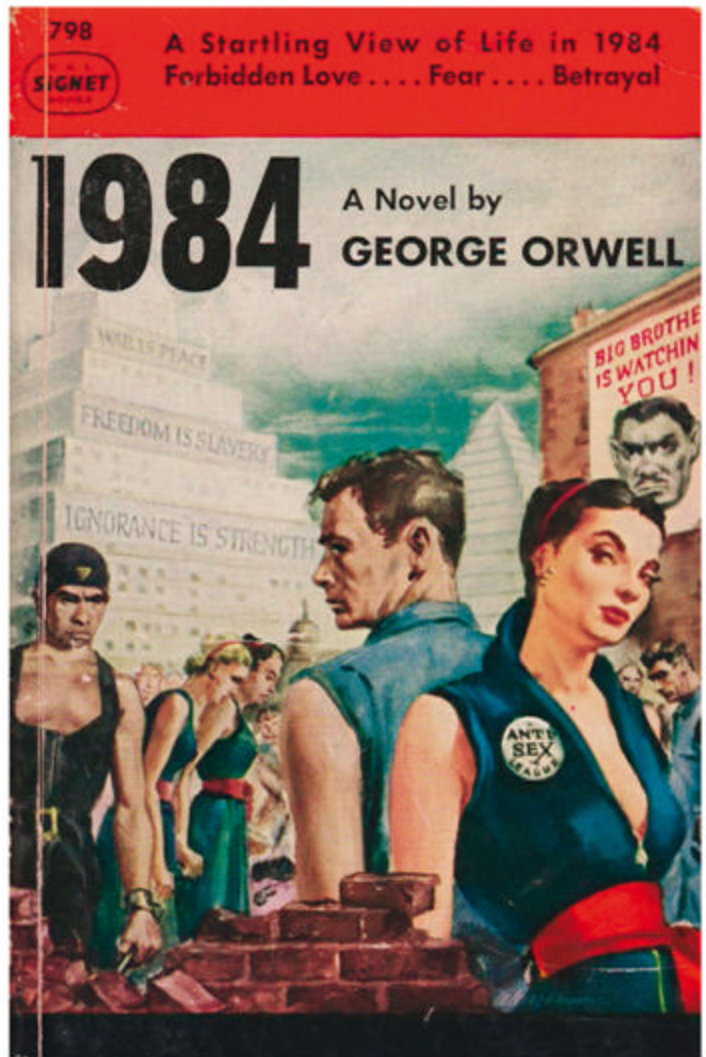
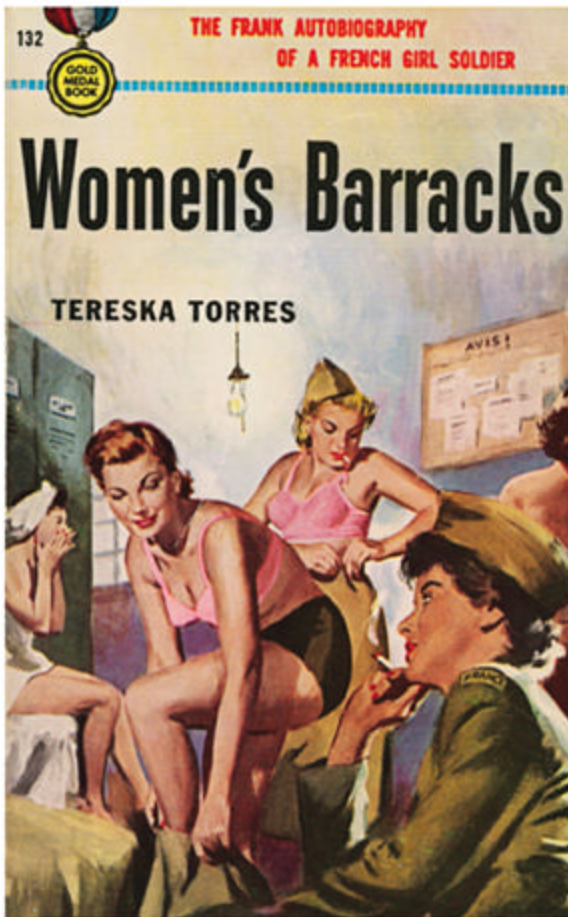
The mass-market paperback was therefore designed to be displayed in wire racks that could be conveniently placed in virtually any retail space. People who didn't have a local bookstore, and even people who would never have ventured into a bookstore, could now browse the racks while filling a prescription or waiting for a train and buy a book on impulse.

Getting the books into those venues did not require reinventing the wheel. Instead of relying on book wholesalers—"jobbers"—who distributed to bookstores, de Graff worked through magazine distributors. They handled paperbacks the same way they handled magazines: every so often, they emptied the racks and installed a fresh supply.

Pocket books were priced to sell for twenty-five cents. De Graff is supposed to have come up with that figure after paying a quarter at a toll booth. No one, he concluded, misses a quarter. Penguins sold for sixpence: Lane believed that his books should not cost more than a pack of cigarettes. This meant that people could spot a book they had always meant to read, or a book with an enticing cover, and pay for it with spare change.

De Graff road-tested his idea in New York City, selling Pocket books in subway newsstands and similar outlets. He knew he had a winner when a hundred

ABOVE: FRANÇOIS AVRIL



and ten books were sold in a day and a half at a single cigar stand. By mid-August, after eight weeks and with distribution expanded to the Northeast corridor, de Graff had sold three hundred and twenty-five thousand books. He had discovered a market. The same month, Penguin opened an American office. Others rushed to compete: Avon started up in 1941, Popular Library in 1942, Dell in 1943, Bantam in 1945, and, after the war ended, half a dozen more, including, in 1948, New American Library (N.A.L.), which published the Signet (fiction) and Mentor (nonfiction) imprints. The paperback era had begun.

Paperbacks vastly expanded the book universe. The industry had got a taste of the possibilities during the war. Encouraged by the success of Pocket and Penguin, publishers collaborated to produce Armed Services Editions of popular titles—double-columned paperback books, trimmed to a size that slipped easily into the pocket of a uniform, and made to be thrown away after use. The books were distributed free of charge to the sixteen million men and women who served during the war. (Publishers also offered their own books for sale to the troops.) According to Rabinowitz, eleven hundred and eighty titles were published in Armed Services Editions, and an astonishing 123,535,305 books were distributed, at a cost to the government of just over six cents a copy.

Servicemen and women stationed overseas were a captive audience, but many came home having acquired a habit of reading for pleasure and a comfort with disposable paperbacks. In 1947, two years after the war ended, some ninety-five million paperback books were sold in the United States. Paperbacks changed the book business in the same way that 45-r.p.m. vinyl records (“singles”), introduced in 1949, and transistor radios, which went on sale in 1954, changed the music industry, the same way television changed vaudeville, and the same way the Internet changed the news business. They got the product cheaply to millions.

Paperbacks also transformed the culture of reading. De Graff was a high-school dropout (as was Lane, who left school when he was sixteen), and he

seems not to have been much of a reader. He had no apparent investment in the notion of books as uplifting. “These new Pocket Books are designed to fit both the tempo of our times and the needs of New Yorkers,” he announced in a full-page ad in the *Times* the day his new line went on sale. (The copy was written for him by someone from an advertising agency.) “They’re as handy as a pencil, as modern and convenient as a portable radio—and as good look-



ing.” Books were not like, say, classical music, a sophisticated pleasure for a coterie audience. Books were like ice cream; they were for everyone. Human beings like stories. In the years before television, mass-market paperbacks met this basic need.

Rabinowitz’s thesis is that mass-market paperbacks were revolutionary in another way as well. She thinks that they were a vehicle for social and cultural enlightenment—that they de-provincialized the American public. That is not how most people thought of them at the time. Editors at the old hardcover houses looked on paperbacks as a bottom-feeding commercial phenomenon, like the pulp magazines and comic books they were distributed with. Critics ignored them, or attacked them as a lowbrow and politically retrograde diversion. Religious and civic groups campaigned to get them regulated or banned.

For it was one thing to reprint literary classics, like “*Wuthering Heights*” (a big seller for Pocket Books) or the tragedies of William Shakespeare (which de Graff regarded as a loss leader). Selling classics and critically acclaimed best-sellers for a quarter was a way of democratizing culture, which has been an impulse in American life since the days of the Library of Useful Knowledge and before.

But, alongside the classics and the reprints of hardcover best-sellers, there

quickly sprouted up on the racks an apparently inexhaustible profusion of books with racy titles and lurid covers: “*Hitch-Hike Hussy*,” by John B. Thompson and Jack Woodford (Beacon), “*I Wake Up Screaming*,” by Steve Fisher (Popular Library), “*Scandals at a Nudist Colony*,” by William Vaneer (Croydon Books), “*The Daughter of Fu Manchu*,” by Sax Rohmer (Avon), which carried the semantically original cover line “*She flaunted an evil conspiracy for power and love.*”

There were also lots of whodunits, like the Perry Mason series, by Erle Stanley Gardner (a huge seller for Pocket Books), and endless iterations of the hardboiled-detective story. Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett were paperbacked, of course, but there were dozens of titles like “*Exit for a Dame*,” by Richard Ellington (Pocket), “*Benny Muscles In*,” by Peter Rabe (Gold Medal Books), “*Report for a Corpse*,” by Henry Kane (Dell), and “*Leave Her to Hell*,” by Fletcher Flora (Avon). (“You meet a lot of gals on the make in my business, but this case had too many dames.”) And, starting with “*I, the Jury*,” in 1948, there were the multimillion-selling Mike Hammer detective novels, by Mickey Spillane (Signet).

This stuff was not trying to pass itself off as serious literature. It was a deliberately down-market product, comic books for grownups—pulp fiction. Rabinowitz’s quite valid point is that when we look back on the mass-market-paperback phenomenon it’s hard to keep the Emily Brontës separate from the Mickey Spillanes. In the same year that Signet published “*I, the Jury*,” it also published reprints of books by James Joyce, William Faulkner, Thomas Wolfe, and Arthur Koestler. Paperback publishers made no effort to distinguish classics from kitsch. On the contrary, they commissioned covers for books like “*Brave New World*” and “*The Catcher in the Rye*” from the same artists who did the covers for books like “*Strangler’s Serenade*” and “*The Case of the Careless Kitten.*”

Avon, one of the most resolutely down-market of the major paperback imprints, used an image of Shakespeare’s head as a colophon. “Millions of readers have found that this trademark represents a high standard of reading en-

tainment,” explains the blurb on the back cover of Avon’s “The Amboy Dukes,” by Irving Shulman. “The Amboy Dukes,” captioned as “A novel of wayward youth in Brooklyn,” and with a cover featuring two teen-agers passionately entangled on the grass, was one of the most notoriously sensational of the pulps. (Not that Shakespeare would have objected to it.)

Rabinowitz is an English professor, and English professors get excited when they see boundaries being blurred. But the blurriness in the postwar paperback world is one of the reasons it’s difficult to sort out what was actually going on. People could once find “Native Son,” “Invisible Man,” and Ann Petry’s “The Street” on the same rack that held books like “Kiss Me, Deadly.” That fact doesn’t quite support Rabinowitz’s idea that “by linking leftist and black authors to Spillane through standardized formats and similar cover art, N.A.L.’s works anticipate a new postwar civil rights landscape, in some ways helping to make *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and their aftermath legible to a largely white working-class readership through detailed chartings of cross-race intimacy.”

The editors at New American Library certainly had no such intention. They made the books look the same because they were trying to sell Ann Petry and Ralph Ellison to people waiting for a bus or looking for something to read in the beauty parlor. And cross-race intimacy is about the last thing (apart from same-sex intimacy) that Spillane’s books could be said to countenance.

Still, Rabinowitz is on to something. It’s too much to say that the mass-market paperback helped to liberalize American social and political attitudes after 1945. You could as plausibly say that paperbacks were one of the things holding change back. The amount of tough-guy pulp, racial stereotyping, and sexist sleaze far outweighed, and outsold, reprints of books by famous writers and marginal voices. But paperbacks did have a role in changing twentieth-century literature. They were market disrupters. They put pressure on the hardcover houses, and that meant putting pressure, in turn, on the legal regulation of print. What you could publish in the

United States and Britain in 1965 was radically different from what you could publish in 1945, and pulp paperbacks were part of the reason. In the process, the pulps lost their clout in the book business. But they died so that Philip Roth and Erica Jong might live.

The paperback presented the publishing industry with a dilemma. Many people in the business, whether they actually read books or not, believed that they should be packaged as upmarket commodities, cultural goods for people looking for something superior to mass entertainments like Hollywood movies and, after 1950, television. “Read a good book” is a phrase that has the ring of virtue. It implies that what is, after all, just another form of distraction is more than that. It recommends taking some private time away from the world to immerse yourself in a mode of enjoyment and edification that belongs to an ancient and distinguished tradition.

This marketing philosophy may have reflected the fear that, if books competed directly with the movies, the movies would win. Whatever the thinking, Pocket Books and its progeny defied it. De Graff packaged books as just another form of distraction, and one completely compatible with everyday life. He imagined people reading books on the way to work, during the lunch hour,

standing in line at the bank—exactly the way that millions of people listen to music through their earbuds today.

You can’t tell a book by its cover, but you can certainly sell one that way. To reach the mass market, paperback publishers put the product in a completely different wrapper. The pulp-paperback cover became a distinctive mid-century art form, eventually the subject of numerous illustrated books, like Richard Lupoff’s “The Great American Paperback” and Lee Server’s “Over My Dead Body,” and Web sites.

The purpose of the art, of course, was to catch the eye and overcome the financial inhibitions of people who were not necessarily shopping for a book. But spicing up the covers put paperback lines in competition with each other, and this quickly turned into a race to the bottom. Scantly clothed women and sexually suggestive scenes, whether the author was Mary Shelley or John D. MacDonald, became almost a requirement of the format. If the book was a hardboiled-detective novel or a mystery, the requirement was a woman wearing a peignoir and holding a gun.

The paperback reprint was therefore in certain respects a different product from its hardcover parent. It was different physically, and it had a different aura as well. George Orwell’s “Nineteen Eighty-Four” was one of the best-selling



“Uh-oh—climate change.”



"Most opera plots could be averted by some decent therapy."

novels of the early nineteen-fifties. The dust jacket for the American hardcover edition, published by Harcourt, Brace in 1949, has an all-text design on a dark-blue monochrome background. Orwell's name and the words "A Novel" are printed in script. Very tasteful, in keeping with the gravity of the subject.

The cover of the 1950 Signet reprint (the artist was Alan Harmon) features a surprisingly toned Winston Smith, in a sleeveless top that shows off his triceps nicely, sneaking a glance at a slinky Julia, in lipstick and mascara, who wears an Anti-Sex League button pinned to a blouse with a neckline that plunges to her tightly sashed midriff. The artist has rendered O'Brien, Wilson's nemesis, as a sort of sadistic swimming instructor—a menacing dude clad in a black skullcap and halter-top outfit cut daringly across the pecs, and clutching what it is hard not to assume is a whip. "For-

bidden Love. . . Fear. . . Betrayal," the blurb says. "Complete and unabridged."

Hardcover dust jackets rarely said "complete and unabridged." The practice of putting that phrase on paperback covers began because de Graff worried that readers associated paperbacks with abridgments, but it became virtually universal among publishers of paperback reprints, since it suggested that you were finally getting the original, uncensored text.

As David Earle puts it in his enlightening study of pulp, "Re-Covering Modernism," mass-market cover art thus managed to recapture the risqué and subversive aura of modernist writing. It put the frisson of scandal back into books, even books that had been around for decades. It might have been ridiculous to imagine that the paperback you bought off the rack in a Sears was underground or samizdat literature, but

that's what mass-market packaging was designed to make you feel.

Cover art was a divisive issue. Allen Lane hated it. Penguin covers were known for their standardized design, and Lane wanted nothing to do with pulp. He is supposed to have raided one of his own warehouses in order to destroy, in a bonfire, books he deemed tasteless. His dislike of cover art was one of the things that led him to break with his American office, in 1948. That's the year that American Penguin became New American Library, the publisher of Mickey Spillane.

The covers also alienated some writers. When "The Catcher in the Rye" was published in hardcover by Little, Brown, in 1951, sales were strong, but it was not one of the best-selling novels of the year. In 1953, the Signet edition came out, and the book sold one and a quarter million copies the first year. The Signet cover was illustrated by James Avati, known as "the Rembrandt of Pulp." It shows Holden Caulfield standing outside what appears to be a Times Square strip-tease joint, with, in the background, what might be a man soliciting a prostitute. "This unusual book may shock you, will make you laugh, and may break your heart—but you will never forget it!" the blurb warns. Salinger was furious, and when the paperback rights to "Catcher" became available again and Bantam got them, he designed the all-text maroon cover himself.

The attempt to use cover art to pimp out titles produced some amusing anomalies. A classic case is the so-called nipple cover, attributed to a prolific pulp artist named Rudolph Belarski. It appeared on the 1948 mass-market Popular Library reprint of a 1925 novel called "The Private Life of Helen of Troy." Belarski claimed that he was always told it didn't matter whether or not the scene depicted on the cover was in the novel. "The editors would say, 'Don't worry, we'll *write* it in. Just make sure to *make 'em round!*'"

He did. His Helen is a blonde in what one takes to be the Mycenaean version of the peignoir, neatly cinched at the waist and under the bust, with a casually elegant aquamarine off-the-shoulder toga and nothing on underneath. (Unless that's a twelfth-century

B.C.E. thong?) And they do pop out. You can see what got Paris's attention. The cover line says, "Complete and unexpurgated."

In fact, there had been nothing to expurgate. There are no references in the novel to breasts, or to any other female body parts, except for a single mention of a "bosom." Most of the book is dialogue. It is a sometimes droll exercise in making characters in Homer's epics converse in contemporary speech. The author was a Columbia English professor named John Erskine, who happened to be the teacher of Lionel Trilling and the creator of the course that became Literature Humanities—Columbia's Great Books requirement. He went on to become the president of Juilliard.

The editors at Popular Library must have known that the nipple cover would work, because Pocket Books had used a similar image on a 1941 reprint of Émile Zola's 1880 novel "Nana," and it had become one of the best-selling Pocket books sold to troops. It went through thirteen printings during the war, and sold 586,374 copies. Popular Library at least had some textual authority for the cover, since the Nana in Zola's novel is an actress who takes male Paris by storm after she appears onstage completely naked under a see-through gown.

So mass-market paperbacking was about as raunchy and exploitative as it could be. On the other hand, who could argue with the numbers? Paperbacking could leverage a title with respectable revenue and decent word of mouth into the sales stratosphere, and often with significant industry knock-on effects. Earle offers the example of Erskine Caldwell's "God's Little Acre," a gothic tale of lower-class Southern whites, with plenty of illicit sex and generous overtones of incest. When Viking brought the book out in hardcover, in 1933, it sold slightly more than eight thousand copies. That was good enough for it to be reprinted in the Modern Library, whose edition sold sixty-six thousand copies. A Grosset & Dunlap reprint sold a hundred and fifty thousand. Then, in 1946, the book was brought out by American Penguin. After eighteen months, three and a half million copies had been sold.

Between 1945 and 1951, Caldwell sold twenty-five million copies of his books in paperback. His success inspired a subgenre of Southern-gothic pulp, with titles like "Swamp Hoyden," by Jack Woodford and John B. Thompson, and "The Sin Shouter of Cabin Road," by John Faulkner. John Faulkner was not a nom de plume; John Faulkner was William Faulkner's brother. And it's likely that the popularity of Caldwell's novels helped William Faulkner's books sell as well. Between 1947 and 1951, Signet published six titles by Faulkner, which had sales of close to 3.3 million. (It helped that Faulkner received the Nobel Prize in 1950.)

One of the biggest sellers of the nineteen-fifties and early sixties, Grace Metalious's "Peyton Place," is essentially a Southern gothic transplanted to New Hampshire. "Peyton Place" came out in 1956; it spent fifty-nine weeks at the top of the *Times* best-seller list; it was turned into a movie and a television series; and by 1966 it had sold ten million copies. It did not inspire a wave of New Hampshire gothic fiction.

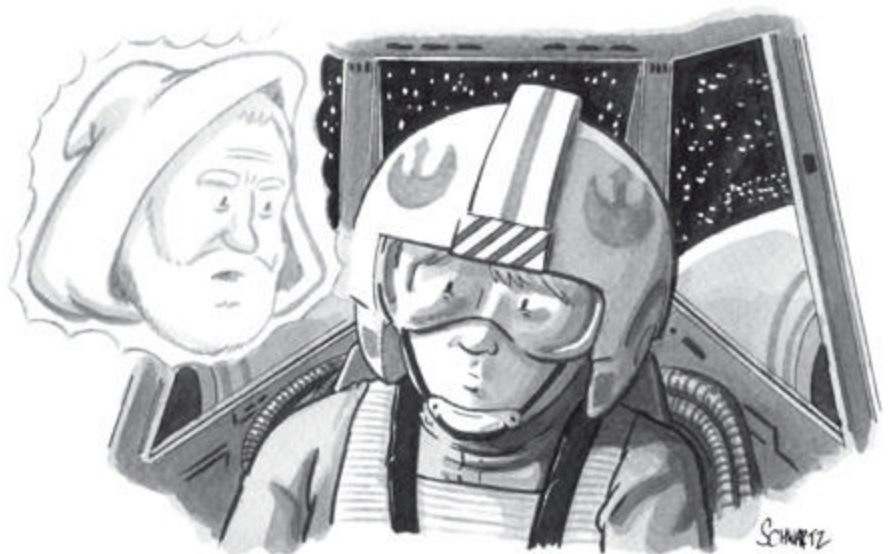
Volume like this was unprecedented. Pocket Books, after its business got established, rarely went to press for less than a hundred thousand copies; Signet started at two hundred thousand, and Fawcett, the publisher of Gold Medal Books, had initial print runs of three hundred thousand. Earle offers a comparison with two celebrated titles from the hardcover era. "The Sun Also

Rises" sold just over five thousand and "The Great Gatsby" a little over twenty thousand copies in their first printings.

The puzzle for hardcover publishers was how to get a piece of the new market without losing respectability or running afoul of the law. "Ulysses" had been declared not obscene by a federal judge, John Woolsey, in 1933, but by then the novel had been out for eleven years and was already canonical. Joyce was one of the most famous writers in the world. American courts since the Woolsey decision had not been so permissive. In 1946, "Memoirs of Hecate County," a collection of interlinked short stories by the *New Yorker* writer Edmund Wilson, was declared obscene by a New York court, and the Supreme Court refused to overturn the decision.

There was political pressure as well. In 1952, a House Select Committee on Current Pornographic Materials was formed, with E. C. Gathings, an Arkansas congressman, as chair. The focus of the committee's inquiry was "the kind of filthy sex books sold at the corner store which are affecting the youth of our country," as Gathings described it. Cover art—"lurid and daring illustrations of voluptuous young women on the covers of the books"—was a special target of criticism.

The star exhibit was a novel called "Women's Barracks," by Tereska Torres, a novelized account of the author's experience serving in London in the Free French Army during the war. One of



"Use your White Privilege, Luke."

the female characters is a lesbian; two others have a brief affair. The book was a paperback original from Gold Medal Books, and, completely contrary to the author's intention, it became one of the first titles in the genre of lesbian pulp fiction.

The cover shows women undressing in a locker room, with a tough female in uniform looking on. But the steamiest passage in the book is this:

How touching and amusing and exciting! Claude ventured still further in discovering the body of the child. Then, so as not to frighten the little one, her hand waited while she whispered to her, "Ursula, my darling child, my little girl, how pretty you are!" The hand moved again.

"Women's Barracks" had already sold a million copies. Thanks to the publicity surrounding the Gathings hearings, Fawcett sold another million. Total sales are said to be four million copies.

In 1953, the committee published its report. "The so-called pocket-size books, which originally started out as cheap reprints of standard works, have largely degenerated into media for the dissemination of artful appeals to sensuality, immorality, filth, perversion, and degeneracy," it concluded. "The exaltation of passion above principle and the identification of lust with love are so prevalent that the casual reader of such literature might easily conclude that all married persons are adulterous and all

teenagers are completely devoid of any sex inhibitions."

But there was little the law could do. Pulp described sexual behavior, but the descriptions were not explicit, and they didn't use obscene language. They were not pornography; they were only packaged that way. The Gathings committee's objection to "Women's Barracks" was simply an objection to homosexuality and other forms of "deviance." Congress sensibly ignored the call for regulatory legislation. But, according to Davis, local efforts to ban pulps persisted around the country, and the whole controversy had a "chilling effect" on the industry.

Which was in trouble for other reasons, too. Mass-market paperbacking turned out not to be a stable business model. The hitch was the pricing. Moving several hundred thousand units of a product sounds impressive, but when the retail price is twenty-five cents the revenue is not so impressive. De Graff paid his writers a four-per-cent royalty. That's a penny a book (which is also what writers were paid for the Armed Services Editions of their books). Once you figured in the retailer's cut (which was up to fifty per cent), paper costs, and distribution, there was very little margin, often something like half a cent a book.

The plan was to recoup sunk costs as quickly as possible, but the break-

even point was extremely high. That's why print runs were so enormous. Profitability might start only somewhere north of a hundred thousand copies. The result was that the market became flooded. In 1950, two hundred and fourteen million paperbacks were manufactured in the United States, generating forty-six million dollars in revenue. But millions of books went unsold. When the wholesalers cleaned out the racks, they sent the books that were left back to the publishers, who had to warehouse or dump them. By 1953, it was estimated that there was an industry-wide inventory of a hundred and seventy-five million unsold books.

There were other developments. Magazines began offering discount subscriptions, which reduced the traffic at newsstands, and the main magazine distribution company, the American News Company, lost an antitrust suit and eventually got out of the business. Although publishers continued to produce rack-size editions, they were no longer saturating the market with pulp.

Meanwhile, a new player had entered the arena, Jason Epstein. Epstein was a product of Columbia College. Publishing, he later said, in his memoir "Book Business," was "an extension of my undergraduate years." After graduating from Columbia, in 1949, he went to work reading manuscripts at Doubleday, the house where Robert de Graff had got his start. Doubleday was still being run by merchandisers who depended on revenue from the company's book clubs, notably the Literary Guild.

Epstein was a book person. He lived in the Village and hung out in the legendary Eighth Street Bookshop. He craved the new hardcover books he browsed there, but he couldn't afford them on his forty-five-dollar-a-week salary. He began to envision cheaper editions of the kind of books he had read at Columbia, and he discussed the idea of paperback reprints of classic and highbrow titles with the bookstore's owners, Ted and Eli Wilentz. In 1953, he launched, for Doubleday, a line of paperbacks called Anchor Books.

Epstein's first list included D. H. Lawrence's "Studies in Classic American Literature" and works by Conrad,



Gide, and Stendhal. Trilling's "The Liberal Imagination" was an early title. The books were priced to break even at around twenty thousand copies, and sold from sixty-five cents to a dollar twenty-five. They were aimed at college students and at slightly more affluent and educated readers. The covers were arty, not cheesy. Many were by Edward Gorey (and Epstein found that those sold especially well).

The product became known as the "quality paperback." This was, of course, to distinguish it from the other kind. But the books were rack-size—in effect, upmarket pulp. (Even Epstein found them a little tacky. After the Eighth Street Bookshop began stocking quality paperbacks, he considered the sight of them, as he later put it, "an affront to the store's serene dignity.")

By 1954, Anchor was selling six hundred thousand books a year—not Mickey Spillane territory, but a sustainable business model. The same year, Knopf launched its quality-paperback line, Vintage Books, and it was soon followed by Beacon and Meridian.

The model of paperbacking upmarket books was taken up by two publishers who were independently wealthy, and not in it for the money: Barney Rosset, the owner of Grove, and James Laughlin, the founder of New Directions. They also picked up from mass-market publishers the practice of producing anthologies of new writing. Mentor published "New World Writing," with work by writers like W. H. Auden, Jorge Luis Borges, and Heinrich Böll; Grove published *Evergreen Review*, a showcase of some of the most advanced writing in the world.

Rosset and Laughlin published paperback editions of works by Samuel Beckett, Ezra Pound, William Carlos Williams, Hermann Hesse, Eugène Ionesco, the Beats, the Black Mountain poets, Tennessee Williams, Nathanael West. They got European and American modernism into the hands of students, professors, and even people waiting for the train.

Grove also published a popular line of pornography that somehow seemed

consistent with its commitment to literary modernism. For the association between smut and modernist writing was an old one. Before the paperback era, what the average person knew about Joyce and Lawrence was that they were dirty writers, and it was easy to imagine that what made all advanced literature advanced was that it trafficked in the unmentionable. I think Rabin-

owitz is right (she is following, with due acknowledgment, Earle's argument in "Re-Covering Modernism") that pulp made the public comfortable with the idea that a book could contain writing that got some readers titillated or aroused and made other readers squirm or blush.

Pulp helped to make the book world safe not only for sex but for the gross, the shocking, and the transgressive. At some point, those things, and not a private immersion in a more edifying realm, became what people expected from the reading experience.

As Loren Glass has explained, in "Counterculture Colophon," Rosset was a major force behind the anti-censorship campaign. He was not involved in the 1957 trial of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl and Other Poems," a paperback from City Lights Books, which was declared not obscene by a San Francisco judge. But he was behind the litigation that lifted the bans on "Lady Chatterley's Lover," in 1959, and Henry Miller's "Tropic of Cancer," in 1964. In both cases, Grove had already published the books, and they had become best-sellers. People who had money to spend liked them. That kind of thing often helps judges make up their minds.

Those cases made it possible for the hardcover houses to publish what they could now claim the reading public always wanted: frank depictions of sexuality by prize-winning and critically acclaimed authors. They began to get books like "An American Dream," "Couples," "Myra Breckinridge," "Portnoy's Complaint," and "Fear of Flying" into bookstores and, from there, into middle-class homes. Mainstream publishing finally caught up with the world. ♦



"It's always 'Sit,' 'Stay,' 'Heel'—never
'Think,' 'Innovate,' 'Be yourself.'"



Peter Steiner, Published June 25, 1990

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ALL TOLD

Rachel Cusk's autobiographical fictions.

BY ELAINE BLAIR



A character in Rachel Cusk's new novel, "Outline," a successful playwright named Anne, has been stricken with a peculiar kind of writer's block. She calls it a problem of "summing up":

Whenever she conceived of a new piece of work, before she had got very far she would find herself summing it up. Often it took only one word: *tension*, for instance, or *mother-in-law*. . . . As soon as something was summed up, it was to all intents and purposes dead, a sitting duck, and she could go no further with it. Why go to the trouble to write a great long play about jealousy when *jealousy* just about summed it up?

Anne's malaise brings to mind a condition that a number of real-life writers have been reporting, including

Cusk herself. Though she's not well known in the United States, Cusk has long been a public figure in England, where she lives. Her first novel, "Saving Agnes," was published to high acclaim, in 1993, when she was in her mid-twenties. As she continued writing, Cusk revealed herself to have an unsparing satirical eye that she directed toward fellow upper-middle-class white women, with the result that among British readers she has passionate detractors as well as champions. Since the early nineties, she has reliably published a novel or a memoir every few years. But, in an interview with the *Guardian* last August, Cusk said that

In her new novel, composed mainly of conversations, Cusk rejects the artifice of her earlier work.

she had recently come to a dead end with the modes of storytelling that she had relied on in her earlier novels. She had trouble reading and writing, and found fiction "fake and embarrassing." The creation of plot and character, "making up John and Jane and having them do things together," had come to seem "utterly ridiculous."

That line sounds like something from Karl Ove Knausgaard. "Just the thought of a fabricated character in a fabricated plot made me feel nauseous," Knausgaard writes in "A Man in Love," the second of the six volumes that make up his novel "My Struggle." In that book, Knausgaard, using real names and verifiable events, describes his own midlife artistic crisis and his renunciation of his earlier forms of novelistic storytelling. Cusk has written admiringly about Knausgaard, and her proposed cure for the trouble with fiction sounds like a gloss of his. "Autobiography is increasingly the only form in all the arts," she told the *Guardian*.

Fifteen or twenty years ago, when writers like David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Franzen argued, in the pages of *The Review of Contemporary Fiction* and in this magazine, about how novels should be written, they discussed difficulty versus pleasure, and when to gratify or foil readers' desires. Today, writers who are trying to expand the possibilities of the novel talk about incorporating the techniques of memoir and essay, of hewing closer to the author's subjective experience, of effacing the difference between fiction and their own personal nonfictions. The casual terms of the debate can be puzzling. Haven't novelists always put autobiographical material to use in novels? Haven't we been reading about a character called "Philip Roth" for years?

There are so many ways for a writer to play with autobiography and authorial identity that there is, effectively, no isolated element in fiction that can be called "autobiography." Cusk's short-hand doesn't begin to account for the variety of literary experiments we've been seeing from novelists like Knausgaard, Ben Lerner, Jenny Offill, Geoff Dyer, and W. G. Sebald. Nor does it prepare us for "Outline" itself. The novel

REFERENCE: ULF ANDERSEN/GETTY

is mesmerizing; it marks a sharp break from the conventional style of Cusk's previous work. The characters in her earlier novels presumably share some of her biography—they age as she does, study or teach literature, raise children, tend to the chores of daily life in London or in provincial towns. But they remain smoothly sealed in their fictional worlds. "Outline" feels different, its world porous and continuous with ours, though not for the reasons we might expect. Cusk has not named her narrator Rachel. She does not put a fine point on the verifiability of the novel's events. Though the narrator is a writer, the novel does not tell the story of how it came to be written. It is not an expansive account of a life but a short account of two days that the narrator spends teaching a writing seminar in Athens. Indeed, "Outline" proposes an unexpected solution to the weariness with fiction which Anne calls "summing up": Cusk has her characters literally sum things up, making them speak about past events rather than showing those events as they unfold. To paraphrase Anne, why manipulate characters into situations dramatizing jealousy when they can *tell* us about their jealousy?

"Outline" is composed almost entirely of conversations. During the course of her trip, Cusk's narrator, Faye, who lives in London, meets with friends in Athens and makes new acquaintances, mostly editors and writers. There seems to be something about her that makes people want to tell her things, or, possibly, they'd be happy going on about themselves to anyone. (It's comical how few questions anyone asks Faye in return for her attention.) The man sitting next to her on the plane over, a Greek businessman from a rich mercantile family, tells her about his childhood spent between Greece and England, about the money that he made and lost, about his former marriages. A fellow writing teacher, a married father from Ireland, tells her how he came to write his first book and why he will probably never write a second. A Greek editor friend tells her why his publishing venture failed; a novelist shares impressions of Polish gender politics from her recent book tour. The two sessions of the writing seminar that Faye teaches

offer a compressed version of the larger scheme of the novel: more talking, more stories beautifully arrayed in their variety and density.

Faye, for her part, says hardly anything. Almost all of her narration consists of paraphrasing what other people have said to her. We come to feel an intimacy with her that has nothing to do with disclosure; though we know conspicuously little about her, we share with her the experience of listening to others, and, as we do so, it becomes clear that a certain kind of conversation is missing from Faye's days and nights. No one speaks to her in the casual shorthand of daily intimacy. Her school-age sons back home in England send her text messages ("*Where's my tennis racket?*") that only sharpen our sense of her isolation, her lack of sustaining closeness with other adults.

With its recessive, enigmatic narrator, "Outline" recalls Sebald's novels, especially "The Emigrants," in which the narrator uses other people's stories to gesture obliquely toward his own preoccupations. As in that book, Faye's withdrawal and indirection seem to indicate melancholy, but she also has a subtly satirical relationship to the world and to the people in it. Her first conversation is held with a tech-industry magnate who takes her to lunch to talk about starting a literary magazine:

The billionaire had been keen to give me the outline of his life story, which had begun unprepossessingly and ended—obviously—with him being the relaxed, well-heeled man who sat across the table from me today.

We may feel like fellow-listeners with Faye, but it would be naïve to forget that the story is hers to shape. When she drops in one of her delicately barbed observations about someone she encounters, our opinion of him never recovers.

What we do learn of Faye's own life is filtered through her discussions with other characters. In response to a question from her airplane neighbor, she tells him:

I lived in London, having very recently moved from the house in the countryside where I had lived alone with my children for the past three years, and where for the seven years before that we had lived together with their father. It had been, in other words, our

family home, and I had stayed to watch it become the grave of something I could no longer definitively call either a reality or an illusion.

The book that Cusk published before "Outline" was a memoir about her divorce, "Aftermath: On Marriage and Separation." It received both praise and stinging criticism. As even generous reviewers pointed out, the memoir seems to be written *around*, rather than *about*, Cusk's marriage. All we learn about the couple is that, at some point well into their ten years together, they reversed traditional gender roles: Cusk's husband left his job to take care of their two young daughters so that she could write. Cusk writes searchingly of her own mixed feelings about this arrangement, but she fails to make sense of the story of her marriage and its end through this one aspect of their domestic lives. Cusk's husband is not present as a character, and she gives no indication of the emotional atmosphere of their union until its apparently bitter end. Everything that Cusk can't say about their lives together seems to create a vacuum that she fills with a series of similes (a dissolved marriage is like a broken plate, or a jigsaw puzzle) and readings of classical literature (marriage is like Clytemnestra and Agamemnon's marriage).

Even aside from questions of family privacy, the artistic parameters of memoir make a recent divorce exceptionally hard to write about. The good memoirist can't afford to compromise readers' sympathies by seeming unreliable. Having seized the enormous power of telling a private story publicly, she cannot appear to blame or impugn others. She must convince readers that she is capable of critical self-appraisal, and of speaking credibly about her motives and desires. Cusk does all this with rigor and wit in "A Life's Work," an earlier memoir about becoming a mother, itself a difficult subject for scrutiny. But she falters in "Aftermath." If there were ever a subject that called for fiction, it would seem to be divorce.

Turning to fiction after the publication of "Aftermath," Cusk might well have gone about channelling what she knew of marriage into intimate scenes staged between two duelling characters,

a husband and a wife. In a previous novel, “The Bradshaw Variations,” she did just that, writing about a couple whose relationship is compromised by the husband’s decision to stay home with their daughter while the wife resumes a full-time professorship. The novel, which alternates between the two characters’ points of view, is structured to bring out the tensions between its protagonists. Readers can see that these tensions will have to mount and crest; we read on to find out how Cusk will make the moves we know she has to make.

Cusk’s insight in “Outline” is that, instead of trying to show two sides of a marriage, she might do the opposite: focus on the inevitable, treacherous one-sidedness of any single account. Perhaps this approach came out of Cusk’s recent experience of narrating her own marriage story publicly and failing to convince her critics of her own reliability. That, she may have decided, would be the experience that she would refract in her next novel. The common difficulty of giving a credible account of a marriage surely has something to do with why marriages themselves come apart. Instead of trying to put John and Jane together in a scene, Cusk could imagine how John would describe it later, to a friend, leaving Jane’s side to be gleaned from his elisions and exaggerations and dubious interpretations. Instead of closing in on her characters, as she does in “The Bradshaw Variations,” Cusk here introduces degrees of remove. We know even less about Faye’s marriage than we do about Cusk’s, in “Aftermath,” but, in the novel, the absence registers not as a weakness but, rather, as a demonstration of all that Faye feels is at stake. Her reticence suggests the depressing, paralyzing effect that the end of her marriage has had on her. She seems unable, or unwilling, to tell her own story. She can only attend very closely to what other people say about their own marriages, as though searching for a key to hers.

Over drinks at an Athens café, Ryan, her fellow writing teacher, reports that he and his wife have “a good partnership,” an assessment that must be weighed against the fact that he compulsively ogles women and jokingly

asks a waitress to run away with him. Ryan says that he and his wife

shared the work of the kids and the house—his wife was no martyr, as his mother had been. She went off on her own holidays with her girlfriends and expected him to take care of everything in her absence: when they gave one another freedoms, it was on the understanding that they would claim those same freedoms themselves. If it sounds a little bit calculated, Ryan said, that doesn’t worry me at all.

Ryan is not a sympathetic figure. He is boorish and inconsiderate. But his account, full of painfully contrived rationalizations, has pathos. Ryan wrote one book of short stories many years ago, when he was in his early twenties. He doesn’t feel that he has the drive to write a second, even though his professional identity is still tied up with being a writer. It’s not only the loss of marriage that can inhibit storytelling; the maintenance of a marriage can impose its own silences. Is it something about his family life that prevents Ryan from writing? Cusk doesn’t say so, but she does invite us to consider the correlation between the two. Ryan compares his writer’s block to marriage:

It’s as if he can’t quite remember what drove him into words in the first place, all those years before, yet words are what he still deals in. I suppose it’s a bit like marriage, he said. You build a whole structure on a period of intensity that’s never repeated. It’s the basis of your faith and sometimes you doubt it, but you never renounce it because too much of your life stands on that ground. Though the temptation can be extreme, he added, as the young waitress glided past our table.

As Cusk’s characters talk about their romantic and domestic situations, echoes and symmetries emerge between their testimonies. Though marriage and family are part of what we call private life, Cusk points us toward their collective, social meaning, not through any direct discussion of marriage’s political or economic function but by changing the scope of the marriage plot. As the conversations accumulate, marriage comes to seem less a story of two people and how they feel about each other than the story of a society and its peculiar domestic arrangements. The Greek businessman tells Faye that “he and his wife had built things that had flourished, had together expanded the sum of what

they were and what they had.” This seems as good a definition—as good a measure—of marriage as any. Faye’s editor friend makes a similar analogy but gives it a negative value. In his former marriage, he says,

the principle of progress was always at work, in the acquiring of houses, possessions, cars, the drive towards higher social status, more travel, a wider circle of friends, even the production of children felt like an obligatory calling-point on the mad journey; and it was inevitable, he now saw, that once there were no more things to add or improve on, no more goals to achieve or stages to pass through, the journey would seem to have run its course, and he and his wife would be beset by a great sense of futility and by the feeling of some malady, which was really only the feeling of stillness after a life of too much motion, such as sailors experience when they walk on dry land after too long at sea, but which to both of them signified that they were no longer in love.

It’s not that they weren’t in love. It’s that they had a feeling that they *interpreted to mean* that they were not in love. Nothing is to be taken for granted when it comes to the definition, the legitimacy, the meaning of love or marriage.

Amid all these recollections of love and its wreckage, there is one moment when a character makes a romantic gesture in the present tense. What scant plot there is in “Outline” comes from the relationship that forms between Faye and her airplane neighbor. They see each other twice in Athens, when he takes her for rides on his boat. At each meeting, he gives her new information about himself that complicates the previous day’s account. The picture of his three former marriages, which he is eager to discuss, is filled in with the help of Faye’s skeptical challenges. The neighbor seems to enjoy her critical attention to the stories he tells. On their second boat ride, he makes the move we’ve been expecting:

My neighbour lifted his head and looked out to sea, his chin raised, his eyes searching the horizon. There was a certain stiffness in his manner, a self-consciousness, like that of an actor about to deliver a too-famous line.

“I have been asking myself,” he said, “why it is that I find myself so attracted to you.”

She bursts into helpless laughter. He perseveres with a quick, clumsy kiss. As soon as he draws back, Faye excuses

herself to go for a swim and jumps over the side of the boat.

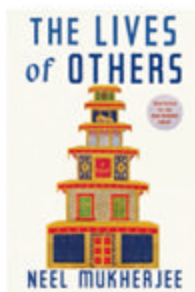
It's one of the few times that two characters in the novel do something other than talk and listen to each other. Faye's brief, involuntary venture into dramatic action is, for her, decidedly not satisfying. That evening, she describes the episode to a friend:

I said that he was old, and that though it would be cruel to call him ugly, I had found his physical advances as repellent as they were surprising. It had never occurred to me that he would do such a thing; or more accurately, before she pointed out that I would have to be an imbecile not to have seen it as a possibility, I thought he wouldn't dare do such a thing. I had thought the differences between us were obvious, but to him they weren't.

Faye's account—all revulsion and affront—is striking for what it leaves out. She's talking about a man in whose company she has chosen to spend many hours, the only person whom she has agreed to see more than once in Athens. What is it about him that she's drawn to? Is it his admiration of her? His storytelling? Perhaps she identifies with him. Or, God knows, she could be taking notes for a book. Whatever it is, Faye doesn't say. When her friend asks if she likes the man, she says that she has “become so unused to thinking about things in terms of whether I liked them or whether I didn't that I couldn't answer her question.” She can only describe her feelings for him as “absolute ambivalence.” For all her exacting observation of others, she's unable to muster much self-scrutiny.

“Outline” gives us a pinched view of romantic alliances. Lovers may find reasonably comfortable arrangements together, Cusk suggests, but in one way or another each will be diminished by them. In Faye's withdrawal, her satirical jabs, her wounded renunciation of her own desire, we see a character who, like her companions on the trip, has been made unlovely by her experience of marriage and its loss. She will not risk large feelings, only small ones: instead of anger, sadness, or ardor, she can express only disdain, disgust, disappointment. In her airplane neighbor, she has found a good, sturdy object for these sentiments. If only he hadn't spoiled their paradise with desires of his own. ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED



THE LIVES OF OTHERS, by Neel Mukherjee (Norton). This finely observed novel explores the lives of three generations of a well-to-do Calcutta family against the backdrop of the Maoist Naxal movement. While various relatives engage in bitter struggles over a dwindling paper-mill fortune, Supratik, an idealistic scion of the family, flees to join the Naxalites in impoverished West Bengali villages. Mukherjee splits the narrative between Supratik's escalating involvement in violent Naxalite campaigns and domestic unrest in Calcutta, creating a vivid portrait of India in the nineteen-sixties and of the persistent influence of colonial rule. As Supratik notes, “The British left our country twenty years ago, but their handiwork will remain for ever.”



THE END OF DAYS, by Jenny Erpenbeck, translated from the German by Susan Bernofsky (New Directions). Crossing twentieth-century Europe, this novel follows a protagonist who dies several times, only to be resurrected by the narrator. Born to impoverished Jews in Hapsburg Galicia, she expires in her crib. In Vienna, as a teen-ager desperately ashamed of her heritage, she enters a suicide pact. As a young woman, she falls victim to a Communist purge. In middle age, a celebrated writer with a son, she's found unconscious at the foot of a staircase. The story's form suggests that history is inescapable. The only solace is that its burdens are communal: inside an antique shop, “everything is squeezed in tightly together, each object casting its shadow on the next.”



THE REPUBLIC OF IMAGINATION, by Azar Nafisi (Viking). Literature and America are the twin poles of this collection of essays. Tracing her path toward becoming an American, Nafisi begins with her English tutor in Tehran reading “The Wizard of Oz” aloud. Later, her itinerant life between Iran and America draws her to Huckleberry Finn, who loathes the very idea of a home. In Nafisi's readings, all is allegory: Huck's moral conscience is under threat from Babbitt's incurious pragmatism. The loneliness of Carson McCullers's characters is a warning, and James Baldwin's humanism is a dream of what the country could be. Nafisi's literary analysis and her personal stories fascinate, though the connections between the two aren't always convincing.

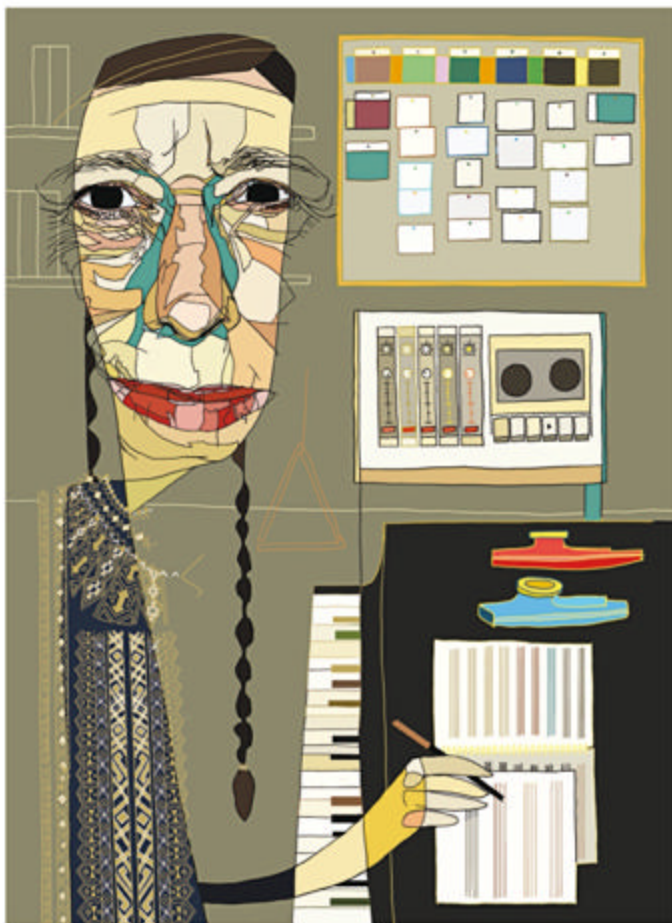


BOHEMIANS, BOOTLEGGERS, FLAPPERS, AND SWELLS, edited by Graydon Carter, with David Friend (Penguin). From 1913 to 1936, *Vanity Fair* was what Carter, the magazine's current editor, describes as a “bible for the smart set.” Readers were as likely to encounter John Maynard Keynes's thoughts on the global financial crisis as they were insights into Cole Porter's likes (movies) and dislikes (baseball). The pieces here reflect the upheaval of the Jazz Age, but also show a canny skepticism about whether modern life was truly unprecedented. D. H. Lawrence writes, “We like to imagine we are something very new on the face of the earth. But don't we flatter ourselves?” The best pieces—Dorothy Parker on the men she didn't marry, Ford Madox Ford on expat artists in Paris—are at once of their moment and timeless.

GUIDED BY VOICES

Meredith Monk and Gabriel Kahane, at BAM.

BY ALEX ROSS



Twenty-first-century music is beginning to assume a sovereign identity, seceding from the colossal, chaotic century that preceded it. Although premature generalizations are hazardous—who, in 1915, could have predicted Stockhausen or Steve Reich?—one trend is clear: we are witnessing the heyday of the singer-composer, a figure that once dominated classical music and then all but disappeared. In the Renaissance and early Baroque eras, singers often wrote for themselves and others; Giulio Caccini and Jacopo Peri, the inventors of opera, both sang professionally. But in later centuries the species became exceedingly rare. The cult of pure sound,

of the magnificent mirage of sonority emanating from large ensembles, meant that composers were much more likely to emerge from the instrumental world. In a sense, to compose was to fall silent, to be ventriloquized by others.

All that changed in the late twentieth century, as singer-songwriters came to the fore in pop and the European and American avant-gardes dismantled the divide between composer and performer. John Cage, sitting at a table with a microphone, was, in effect, singing his own work. Beginning in the late sixties, Meredith Monk fashioned a broader, more radical unity of disciplines: she sang, she danced, she wrote for instruments, she

created spectacle. Downtown Manhattan became a haven for a new breed of singer-composer: Laurie Anderson recited surreal slogans, Joan La Barbara traced airy patterns, Diamanda Galás howled demonically. In Europe, Cathy Berberian's collaborations with Luciano Berio established a form of avant-garde bel canto. The category has exploded in the past decade: a short list of younger composer-vocalists would include, in America, Lisa Bielawa, Kate Soper, Caroline Shaw, and Corey Dargel; and, abroad, Maja S. K. Ratkje, Erin Gee, Jennifer Walshe, and Agata Zúbel. Their vocal techniques range from operatic purity to spluttering glosolalia and on to pop inflections, but they have in common a tendency to use their own voices not merely as lead instruments but as structuring principles. No matter how intricate the composition, it wells up from the body at the center of the stage.

Significantly, this is the first classical genre to be dominated by women. The musicologist Susan McClary notes that “women have rarely been permitted agency in art, but, instead, have been restricted to enacting—upon and through their bodies—the theatrical, musical, cinematic, and dance scenarios concocted by male artists.” When women employ their own voices as vessels for musical thought, they are amending history: the expressivity of the female voice speaks, at last, for female ideas, rather than for male ideas about female ideas. And, whatever the gender of the composer, there is an uncanny charge in seeing someone sing a score that he or she has constructed. The sensual immediacy of the voice merges with abstractions of the mind, until, as in the Wallace Stevens poem, the composer becomes the “single artificer of the world in which she sang.”

Monk began her New York career fifty years ago, and the current season finds her in a celebratory mood, presiding over—and participating in—presentations of her work at BAM, at Carnegie Hall, and elsewhere in the city. She holds the Debs Composer's Chair at Carnegie, a post that had previously been occupied by Pierre Boulez and Elliott Carter, masters at summoning thickets of sound from the written page. Monk operates in a completely different way. Although she has produced conventional-looking scores for

Monk's compositions extract every imaginable color and timbre of the human voice.

orchestras and smaller ensembles, most of her large-scale pieces have emerged from extended working sessions with a trusted circle of collaborators. These compositions, which are generally non-verbal, extract every imaginable color and timbre of the human voice. Monk once described the end result as “folk music from another planet.”

“On Behalf of Nature,” Monk’s latest theatre work, played at BAM’s Harvey Theatre in early December. Scored for six dancer-singers and two instrumentalists, it is an oblique treatment of environmental themes: oblique because there are no words. The performers move about on a mostly bare stage, suggesting, without being too definite, organisms of various species populating the earth and a human contingent exploring, settling, mastering, and running amok. Atmospheric lighting, by Elaine Buckholtz, conjures changing seasons and climates. A short video collage, mixing biological imagery with scenes of urban frenzy, makes the political undertow of the piece inescapable. So, too, does a central solo by Monk, raw and ranting and guttural; at one point, she mouths silently at the audience and gestures toward an unseen catastrophe.

I kept thinking of “Appalachian Spring”—Aaron Copland’s luminous score, Martha Graham’s lithe dances. Monk similarly generates a sense of wide-open space: an arm-extending gesture here, a vocal chirrup or grunt there, and suddenly you are in the fields at dusk. There is a rapturous sequence in which a couple exchange murmurs of melody, sitting down, getting up, sitting down again, leaning on each other: they seem to represent pioneers growing old in harmony with nature. Soon, though, mechanized motions intrude upon the pastoral: one scene has the performers marching jerkily to a strict 4/4 beat, with tritones destabilizing the harmony. Lamenting ostinatos and mournful cries bracket the more upbeat episodes, giving them a wistful air.

Whenever Monk sang, you couldn’t take your ears off of her: those precisely calibrated wails from the back of the throat; those resonant clicks and breaths and sighs; those folklike fragments of song that dip and rise in lilting rhythm. To some extent, “On Behalf of Nature” takes life from her voice, as other members of the ensemble strive to match it.

But Monk also manages to turn herself into a cog in her own organic machine: the piece depends on her ideas about form and sound, not on her charisma. She becomes almost incidental in the final tableau, in which the performers walk off one by one while silver disks sway to and fro on long, thin wires, setting up visual rhythms independent of the music, their arcs gradually shortening, until the lights are turned off and the music fades away.

Three nights after Monk finished her run at the Harvey, the singer, songwriter, and composer Gabriel Kahane arrived in the same space to present “The Ambassador,” a staged song cycle that muses on fantasies and realities of Los Angeles. At first listen, Kahane seems rooted in the world of indie pop, with a sonorous, microphone-friendly baritone and tricky song structures that recall, variously, the work of Joni Mitchell, Elvis Costello, and Radiohead. But he has also written string quartets and other instrumental pieces, and has established a career as a theatre composer; “February House,” his overstuffed musical about the Brooklyn Heights brownstone where W. H. Auden once roomed with Carson McCullers and Benjamin Britten, played at the Public in 2012. It is, to say the least, uncommon to find an artist who is equally at ease in the night club, the concert hall, and the theatre: not even Monk has managed that.

Kahane was born in Venice Beach in 1981, but grew up largely on the East Coast. Now a Brooklynite, he has long been fixated on his native city: its crazy-quilt architecture, its profound social divisions, its ambiguous representation in film and literature, its tendency to serve as a screen on which the rest of America projects its desires and fears. Each song in “The Ambassador” (most of which can also be heard as an album on the Sony Masterworks label) is pegged to a building or a street address: “Musso and Frank” depicts a Chanderlesque private eye brooding in that venerable Hollywood grill, over a louche, brassy vamp; “Villains,” poppy and sardonic, annotates Hollywood’s history of staging mayhem in modernist residences (“How would you feel / If we moved into / The house where they shot / ‘Pulp Fiction?’”); “Veda” makes a slow, sad waltz of the familiar story of Mildred Pierce; “Ambassador

Hotel” tells, through the persona of an elderly doorman working his last shift, of the now demolished palace where Rudolph Valentino held court and Robert Kennedy was assassinated (“The Ambassador’s been bleeding out / And now they’ve let her die”). Kahane sings each number himself, with the backing of a hyper-versatile instrumental septet, half rock band and half chamber ensemble. He deftly navigates the stylistic turns required by the material, his vocal polish achieving a kind of transparency that allows characters and stories to speak.

If all this seems a little bookish and secondhand, “The Ambassador” has at its heart a blunt, harrowing song called “Empire Liquor Mart,” told from the perspective of Latasha Harlins, an African-American teen-ager who was shot and killed by a Korean store owner shortly after the beating of Rodney King, in 1991. Latasha, speaking at the instant of her death, tells of her family’s flight from East St. Louis to L.A., mocks media coverage of South Central, and sings, “I suppose it’s no surprise / To find myself about to die.” The musical setting begins with a barebones chant and then grows ornate, with a trio of strings supplying more of a classical stamp than anything else in the cycle. Confronting the social realm farthest from his own experience, Kahane wisely casts the widest stylistic net. And, having got away with channelling Joan Crawford, he accomplishes the even riskier feat of impersonating Latasha. Switching between a plaintive middle register and a thin, bright falsetto, he gives glimpses, without seeming to presume too much, of her fatalism and her innocence.

The BAM staging, directed by John Tiffany, with sets by Christine Jones, emphasized the literariness of Kahane’s vision of L.A.: stacks of books evoked the skyscrapers of downtown, and mounds of screenplays suggested the Hollywood Hills. Attempts to flesh out his gallery of personae sometimes fell flat—at the beginning, he mysteriously moved a figurine around a model of the Westin Bonaventure Hotel—but the cluttered, allusion-rich environment honored the engaging density of the composer’s vision. What mattered most, as in Monk’s work, was the sense that a solitary voice had fostered an original world. To see it happen almost on consecutive nights, in the same space, bodes well for the century now unfolding. ♦

ON TELEVISION

BUTTON-PUSHER

The seductive dystopia of “Black Mirror.”

BY EMILY NUSSBAUM



“**L**ip-read reconstruction: enabled,” a Siri-like voice says. The jealous husband has exactly what he needs—the ability to scrutinize his wife flirting with another man. Frantically, he rewinds his memories, which are stored in a “grain” implanted behind his ear. An update on “The Twilight Zone” for the digital age, “Black Mirror,” a dystopian drama created by Charlie Brooker for Britain’s Channel 4, has a swagger to its strangeness, a swallow-the-red-pill, anything-can-happen audacity. For a full day after watching the first episode (which I obtained through occult means, before Netflix made the show available to U.S. viewers), I felt disoriented, dropped on a new planet.

Still, for all the show’s inventive story-

telling, its true provocation is its righteous outrage, which shares something with Mike White’s whistle-blower series “Enlightened,” although it’s overlaid with a dark filter. Like “Enlightened,” “Black Mirror” is about love in the time of global corporate hegemony. It’s a bleak fairy tale that doubles as an exposé. An anthology series, it consists of six one-hour episodes spanning two seasons (plus a Christmas special), each with a new story and a different cast. In various future settings, Brooker’s characters gaze into handhelds or at TV-walled cells, using torqued versions of modern devices. In one episode, a couple has sex while stupefied by virtual visions of earlier, better sex. In another, a woman builds a replica of her husband from his photos and posts on social media.

In a third, workers watch streaming schlock and are docked points if they shut their eyes. Some plots deal with political terrorism (or performance art—on this show, there’s little difference) and the criminal-justice system; there are warped versions of reality TV. Though the episodes vary in tone, several have a Brechtian aggression: the viral video “Too Many Cooks” would fit right in. But, in even the most perverse installments, there’s a delicacy, a humane concern at how easily our private desires can be mined in the pursuit of profit. The worlds can be cartoonish, but the characters are not.

Back when Rod Serling’s “The Twilight Zone” aired, in the fifties and sixties, it was an oasis in a bland era. Through sci-fi metaphor, Serling could talk about civil rights and the Red Scare without the censors stepping in. His endings could be unhappy, even nihilistic—a break with the industry’s feel-good ways. Brooker has a lot in common with Serling: he’s an absurdist, with a taste for morality plays and horror shows. He knows how to land a punch. Yet he’s responding to a very different media environment, one that is saturated with “edginess,” from sexy torture scenes to cynical satire. “Black Mirror” slices at this material from several angles, critiquing the seductions of life lived through a screen. It’s an approach that could easily turn pedantic—just another op-ed about Tinder-cruising millennials—but it never does. Because Brooker is an insider, with a deep and imaginative understanding of tech culture, he doesn’t come off as “The Simpsons”’s “Old Man Yells at Cloud” (or Aaron Sorkin, his representative here on earth). He can’t condescend to those who rely on their devices, because he’s so clearly one of us.

One difficulty in writing about “Black Mirror,” however, is that it relies on O. Henry-level plot twists, which is why this paragraph’s first sentence is an elaborate “spoiler alert,” written with enough dependent clauses to give you sufficient time to put this review aside and move on, so that I can talk about a few of the episodes in greater detail. O.K., then! There has been a divisive response to the show’s first episode, “The National Anthem,” which a few viewers called, to use the worst yet most appropriate word, “ham-handed.” The plot is simple. A beloved British princess is kidnapped. The Prime Minister is woken up in the

Toby Kebbell in an episode of Charlie Brooker’s inventive sci-fi series.

middle of the night and shown a ransom video. “What do they want?” he asks, bleary, still in his bathrobe. “Money? Release a jihadi?” After some throat-clearing, his aides hit Play. “At 4 P.M. this afternoon, Prime Minister Michael Callow must appear on live British television, on all networks, terrestrial and satellites,” the princess says, weeping as she reads the statement. “And have full, unsimulated sexual intercourse with a pig.”

Aghast, the Prime Minister says that of course he won’t do it—and that this must be negotiated privately. He’s living in the past: the video is on YouTube. As soon as it’s banned, it’s duplicated. No matter how many injunctions the government places on TV news, the video still trends on Twitter. The pig-fucking plot seems as crass as can be, but as the episode progresses Brooker ups the ante—step by step, the Prime Minister’s team tries to evade the rules, to trace the black-mailer, all while surfing media response. One news producer resists airing the story, only to find that his competitors have already done so, then clutches his head, saying, “Oh, God, this planet.” He swiftly reels off assignments: “Simon, set tone with Standards and Practices. We need to explain this without viewers sickening up their Weetabix. Lorcan! The Internet aspect, new paradigm, Twitter, the Arab Spring, all that bibble.” Cable-news polls ask, “Would you watch?” while excerpts from tweets float above footage of the sobbing princess.

The story is ugly and hilarious and beautifully paced, but, like all of “Black Mirror,” it works because it’s not cynical about emotion. The Prime Minister’s abject terror is the story’s engine, along with the impact on his wife, who obsessively reads the YouTube comments. “Everyone is laughing at us,” she tells him. “It’s already happening in their heads.” Cunningly, the camera returns, repeatedly, to shots of viewers watching the news: a couple in bed, interns in a hospital, employees at a pub. They grimace and make smutty cracks; they talk pretentiously about Dogme 95. They’re sad and angry, but of course they’re also titillated—who wouldn’t be? None of this is purely realistic, but it pinpoints something repellent about our appetites, the way that even the photographs from Abu Ghraib became, within weeks, a dirty joke. In the final scenes, Brooker makes

an uncompromising move: rather than play coy about the outcome, he forces us to be the audience. In an excruciating sequence, we watch the Prime Minister enter a room with a pig, lower his pants, and begin the act, and then we watch as Britain watches, the camera lingering on a diversity of faces, their varied expressions crumpling into united despair. Subtlety would have been the wrong approach for this type of story. In an era of ironized jabs, there’s something refreshing about a creator who’s willing to underline his point in furious black marker.

The same is true of the second episode, “Fifteen Million Merits,” a Stygian tale of an immersively “gamified” society in which young lovers see a televised singing competition as their only possibility for escape. (The episode also happens to be the most searing anti-pornography narrative since Andrea Dworkin’s “Mercy.”) Two quieter stories about marriage and love, “The Entire History of You” and “Be Right Back,” are equally strong, and, while I won’t describe “The White Bear,” it’s still giving me nightmares. The final episode of Season 2, “The Waldo Moment,” is a multilayered masterpiece about a self-loathing comedian (the exemplary Daniel Rigby) who plays a shock-jock cartoon avatar, Waldo the Bear. When he reluctantly runs for political office, as a publicity prank, he discovers to his alarm how easy it is to wreck the system with facile dick jokes and cheap sarcasm. “I’m not dumb or clever enough to be political,” he complains, but the machine he’s in is already rolling and can’t be stopped.

Anyone who has skimmed Guy Debord’s Wikipedia page or watched the American Music Awards could condemn our culture as a masquerade, a spectacle of virtuality. But what’s refreshing about “Black Mirror” is that Brooker goes deeper than that, aiming past the obvious targets—the know-nothings and narcissists of the Internet. Instead, his villains are the bad-faith cynics, like the reality-TV judge, in one episode, who murmurs, with cagey calculation, “Authenticity is in woefully short supply.” In “Black Mirror,” the danger is not complacency, or, at least, not that alone: it’s letting your outrage turn into contempt, a pose of transgression that is, in the end, more deadly than any desperation to be loved. ♦

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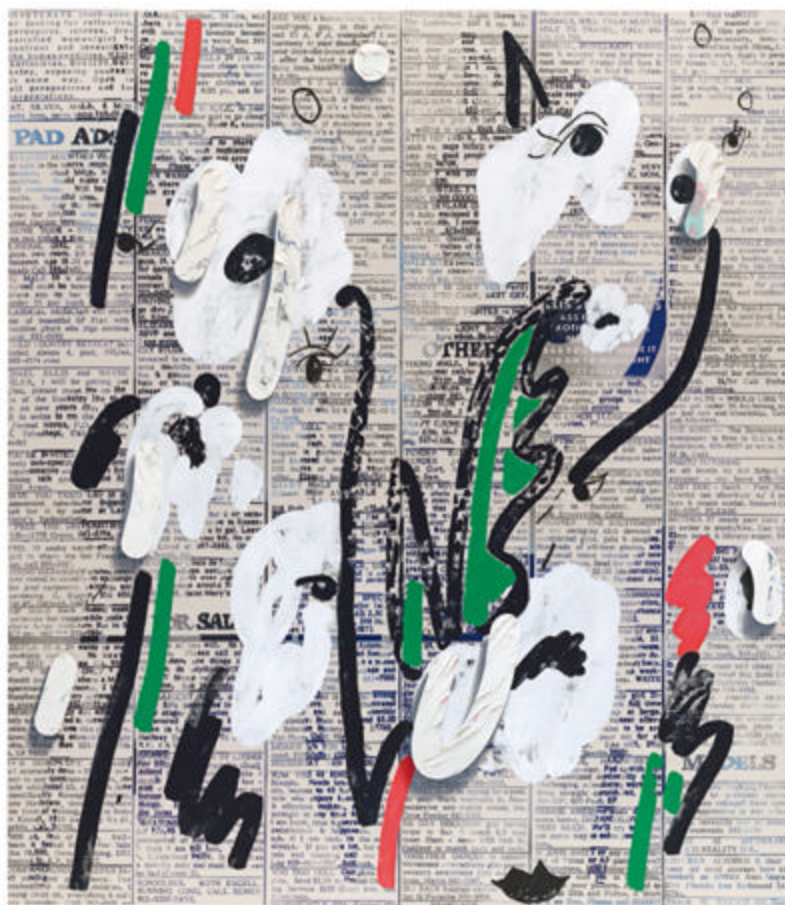
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TAKE YOUR TIME

New painting at the Museum of Modern Art.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL



“Where is the wisdom we have lost in knowledge? / Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?” Those lines, from T. S. Eliot’s “Choruses from ‘The Rock,’” published in 1934, came to mind at “The Forever Now: Contemporary Painting in an Atemporal World,” a challenging show of seventeen mid-career artists at the Museum of Modern Art. The note of dismay resonates generally today, when another of Eliot’s prophetic laments—“distracted from distraction by distraction,” from a year later, in “Burnt Norton”—might be this morning’s spiritual weather report. But consider the signal plight of painting. The old, slow art of

the eye and the hand, united in service to the imagination, is in crisis. It’s not that painting is “dead” again—no other medium can as yet so directly combine vision and touch to express what it’s like to have a particular mind, with its singular troubles and glories, in a particular body. But painting has lost symbolic force and function in a culture of promiscuous knowledge and glutting information. Some of the painters in “Forever Now,” along with the show’s thoughtful curator, Laura Hoptman, face this fact.

Don’t attend the show seeking easy joys. Few are on offer in the work of the thirteen Americans, three Germans,

and one Colombian—nine women and eight men—and those to be found come freighted with rankling self-consciousness or, here and there, a nonchalance that verges on contempt. The ruling insight that Hoptman proposes and the artists confirm is that anything attempted in painting now can’t help but be a do-over of something from the past, unless it’s so nugatory that nobody before thought to bother with it. In the introduction to the show’s catalogue, Hoptman posits a post-Internet condition, in which “all eras seem to exist at once,” thus freeing artists, yet also leaving them no other choice but to adopt or, at best, reanimate familiar “styles, subjects, motifs, materials, strategies, and ideas.” The show broadcasts the news that substantial newness in painting is obsolete.

Opening the show, in the museum’s sixth-floor lobby, are large, virtuosic paintings on paper by the German Kerstin Brätsch, which recall Wassily Kandinsky and other classic abstractionists. Brätsch encases many of her paintings in elaborate wood-and-glass frames that are leaned or stacked against a wall. The installation suggests a shipping depot of an extraordinarily high-end retailer. Next, there is a wall of six canvases by the American Joe Bradley, who, at the age of thirty-nine, has been hugely successful with dashing pastiches of circa-nineteen-eighties Neo-Expressionist abstraction. His pictures here are swift sketches in grease pencil that a child not only could do but has likely already done, such as a stick figure, the Superman insignia, a number (“23”), or a lone drifting line. How little can a painting be and still satisfy as a painting? Very little, Bradley ventures. After straining for a sterner response to the works, I opted to relax and like them.

Disarming, too, is the show’s youngest artist, the twenty-eight-year-old Colombian art-market phenomenon Oscar Murillo, who shows stitched-together, furiously scribbled and slathered, uncannily elegant abstractions somewhat in the vein of early Robert Rauschenberg. In addition to the canvases that are stretched and hung on the walls, several lie loose and heaped on the floor. Viewers are encouraged to rummage through them, pick them up, and inspect them. (This provides a

Struggling to tame a wild mental landscape: Laura Owens’s “Untitled” (2013).

definite frisson—you're playing with paintings by someone whose works sell for hundreds of thousands of dollars—enhanced by the clayey odor of fresh oil stick.) The American Josh Smith, a year younger than his friend Bradley, joins him in testing the world's tolerance for shambling improvisation. Fantastically prolific, he creates series of bravura paintings, all of them five feet high, four feet wide, with motifs that include monochromes, kitschy tropical sunsets, kitschy memento mori (skulls and skeletons), and his own signature. What is painting for? Smith's answer stops a winsome step short of nihilism: something more or less lively to hang on a wall. As with Bradley, resistance to Smith is understandable but, in the end, too tiring to maintain.

Painters of a more conventionally serious stamp are on hand. The most distinctly original is the forty-six-year-old American Mark Grotjahn. His palette-knife patterning, packed and energized in smoldering colors, yields tensions that you can feel in your gut. Grotjahn's art may not be about much beyond the pleasures of his mastery, but it is awfully good. More symptomatic of Hoptman's thesis of "atemporality" are works by the Americans Julie Mehretu and Amy Sillman. Mehretu, forty-four, rose to fame, and a MacArthur Fellowship, in the past decade with exhaustingly complex compositions of overlaid marks and diagrams, which seemed bent on mirroring our cybernetic age in total. To my relief, she appears to have abandoned that conceit in order to liberate her inner abstract lyricist, with skittery gray paintings that pay candid and exhilarating homage to Cy Twombly. Sillman, fifty-nine, revisits modern-art looks, from around 1940, by the likes of Arshile Gorky and Willem de Kooning, to which she adds mainly the assurance of knowing, as they could not, that they were on a right track.

If one modern master haunts "Forever Now," it is Sigmar Polke, who, from the early nineteen-sixties until his death, in 2010, ran painting through wringers of caustic irony and giddy burlesque. He hovers at the shoulders of the two most impressive painters who befit Hoptman's theme of present pastness, the German Charline von Heyl, fifty-four, and Laura Owens,

forty-four, from Los Angeles. Heyl's mixes and matches of elements of many styles forswear irony but take Polke's restless eclecticism as a rule. Each stages a more or less successful struggle to tame a wild mental landscape. The quicksilver Owens contributes two rather precious new works—bagatelles, really—that feature perfunctory touches of paint on silk-screened reproductions of an advertisement for bird feeders and of a notebook page bearing a sarcastic fairy tale written out in a child's guileless hand. But be sure to spend time with her large abstraction, an untitled work from 2013, hanging in MOMA's ground-floor lobby: gestural glyphs and splotches in white, black, green, and orange on a ground imprinted with a blown-up page of newspaper want ads. It is almost off-handedly majestic and preternaturally charming, and my favorite work in the show. It suggests Polke mistaking himself for Joan Miró.

It will surprise many, as it did me, that "Forever Now" is the first large survey strictly dedicated to new painting that MOMA has organized since 1958, when "The New American Painting," a show of seventeen artists, including all the major Abstract Expressionists, went on to tour Europe and to revolutionize art everywhere. Hoptman clearly considered the echo, presenting the same number of painters—except that this group bodes little change in art anywhere, that being a melancholy mark of its pertinence today. But even more arresting is the mere occurrence of the show at MOMA. Hoptman strives to shoehorn painting back into a museum culture that has come to favor installation, performance, and conceptual and digital work. The effort seems futile, at least in the short run.

You can see the painters in "Forever Now" reacting to the dilemma of an image-making art struggling to stand out in an image-sickened society—"Filled with fancies and empty of meaning," as Eliot went on from his line about distraction. The artists' tactics include emphases on gritty materiality and refusals of comforting representation. It's a strong show, and timely. But its own terms make it more expressive of honest discontent than of inspiring invention. Painting can bleed now, but it cannot heal. ♦

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"Two Days, One Night" and "Leviathan."

BY ANTHONY LANE

The new film from the Dardenne brothers, *"Two Days, One Night,"* would make a punchy double bill with Steven Spielberg's *"Lincoln."* In size and manner, the two movies could not be more different. One centers on the House of Representatives, the other on a solar-panel plant in Belgium. One has a noble score by John Williams and the other has no score at all, unless you count three people singing along to Van Morrison in a car. Yet the dynamic is the same: a hunt for votes. *Lincoln* needs them to pass the Thirteenth Amendment, while Sandra (Marion Cotillard), in *"Two Days, One Night,"* needs them if she is to keep her job. Her sixteen fellow-workers were given a choice: if they agreed to longer shifts, and voted for Sandra to be laid off, each of them would get a thousand-euro bonus. They said yes, but now the boss—whether out of fairness or cruelty—has allowed a second ballot. Over a weekend, with her husband (Fabrizio Rongione), Sandra must track down her colleagues and persuade them, one at a time, to reconsider. If a majority sides with her, and forfeits the cash, she can stay. What a deal! Mephistopheles himself could have devised nothing sweeter.

Does it constitute a plot, though, or merely a sequence of events? Might we not grow weary of traipsing around with Sandra as she knocks on doors? The Dardenne brothers are alive to that risk, and their answer is to edit and propel the action, however downbeat its details, as if it were a thriller. Only piece by piece, for instance, do we gather salient facts about the heroine—that she has been on sick leave, and that the sickness was

depression. Now she pops one Xanax after another as if they were M&M's. We begin to sense difficulties, too, not just in her marriage but in the lives of others. One woman, whose partner forced her to take the bonus to pay for a patio, switches her loyalty to Sandra and later says, in a liberating note of joy, "I've never decided anything for myself



Marion Cotillard (center) in a Dardenne brothers film.

before." We soon learn to predict, from a single glance on the doorstep, guilty or benign, how each person voted in the first round, and the suspense of the tale—sharper than you would expect—comes from hoping for changes of heart.

"Two Days, One Night" is less of a marvel than *"The Kid with a Bike,"* the Dardenne brothers' previous film. There they made a fable out of a predicament; it was as if documentarians had been hired

to record a fairy tale. The new project is a more dogged affair. Yet the makers' charity and sobriety are undimmed, and they have surrendered none of their purpose in electing to work, for the first time, with a star of high rank. Cotillard looks dwindled and drained, leached of allure by the unkind pallor of the lighting. Anxiety and depression are made flesh, implanted in muscle and breath; hence the involuntary gulps and gasps with which Sandra punctuates her speech. Best of all is the moment at which, utterly engulfed by her campaign, she faints. Most leading actresses would request, at least, that the camera should retreat to a respectful distance and allow them to swoon tremendously in long shot. Bette Davis would have demanded a full orchestra. But Cotillard just drops out of the bottom of the frame. Of course, she is the center of attention throughout, yet what matters is her willingness to conspire in the Dardenne brothers' plea for justice, as it echoes from one movie to the next, from the lonely boy with a bike to the woman who wants a job: attention must be paid to such a soul.

One of the hardest things to decide, as you stumble out of *"Leviathan,"* is whether you have watched a large movie or a small one. Much of the action is stuck on spits of land at the edge of the Kola Peninsula, in northwestern Russia. Moscow is hopelessly distant; one character, offered a chance to move there and begin afresh, scorns the very thought. There are no armies on the march, or international incidents. Rather, the fate of a few citizens, unregarded and often unsavory, lies in the balance. Many conversations start and end around a kitchen table. Why, then, should we be left with such an impression of grandeur, limitless suffering, and wrath?

Kolya (Aleksey Serebryakov) lives near the shore, in a ramshackle house where his family has dwelt for generations; we see it in old photographs on the wall. He has a beautiful wife, Lilya (Elena Lyadova), and a teen-age son,

Roma (Sergey Pokhodaev), from an earlier marriage. Father and son express their mutual love in fisticuffs, sometimes playful, sometimes not. The house is menaced by the mayor, a squat and unrelenting brute named Vadim (Roman Madyanov). He wants to develop the site, and what the mayor wants he gets. In an extraordinary scene, a judge reads out a ruling in favor of Vadim against Kolya, rattling forth the words at a pace that would put Danny Kaye to shame, while the camera slowly worms toward the bench.

Into this setup comes Dmitriy (Vladimir Vdovichenkov)—a buddy of Kolya's, now a lawyer, and the closest thing to a sophisticate that the film can supply. He challenges Vadim, and even tries to blackmail him with a file of former sins; imagine how well that works. One of the great virtues of "Leviathan," and a source of its surprising spaciousness, is how zealously the director, Andrey Zvyagintsev, takes time to follow minor characters to a point where their predicaments strike a major chord. It happens with Dmitriy, who, not because he is dashing but simply because he seems different, lures Lilya into bed; it happens with Lilya, whose desperation swells at every turn; and it happens, unforgettably, with Roma, a spitfire of confusion and resentment, who spends his evenings with a gaggle of other youths, learning how to drink.

Dear God, the drinking. The people in this movie put away vodka like marathon runners taking on water. Without it, who could stand the pace? Alcohol is for every occasion: to toast, to mourn, to oil the wheels of a fight. Po-

licemen are among the champion boozers. "Are you O.K. to drive?" a woman asks her husband. "I'm a traffic cop, aren't I?" he replies. The blend of clear liquor and tar-black humor is served up without cease, most lavishly at a birthday celebration by the sea, where the wives cook chicken while their menfolk, as drunk as lords and armed like mercenaries, loose off weapons at will. The targets are framed portraits of former Soviet leaders, brought along for fun. The movie itself is taking comic potshots here, but what stays in the air, once the scene is over, is a whiff of unmanageable wildness, as though the edges of civilization had been clawed. If Zvyagintsev begins and ends "Leviathan" with seascapes, and with the smash of waves against eroded rocks, he is not showing off his majestic setting. He is reminding us that everything, stones and nation-states, can be eaten away.

The best one-liner in "Leviathan" comes in the opening credits: "With support from the Russian Ministry of Culture." Reportedly, as much as thirty-five per cent of the budget was supplied by government funding. This is like Kazakhstan using oil revenues to pay for "Borat." Hardly any aspect of the body politic emerges from "Leviathan" unscarred, starting with the picture of an almost smiling Vladimir Putin that hangs behind the desk in Vadim's office. He and the town's priest enjoy an amicable dinner, and the mayor is present, together with his fur-draped wife, for the rousing sermon that the man of God delivers at the climax, clasping Russia and its resurgent pride to the bosom of the Orthodox Church. The weather in

this movie may be peculiarly mild, but make no mistake: a moral permafrost has set in.

As for the title, it refers to many things: the fearsome view of constitutional order propounded by Thomas Hobbes, in 1651; the skeleton of a whale, stranded and whitened on the beach; and the monster named in the Book of Job, of whom the Almighty says, "Lay thine hand upon him, remember the battle, do no more." Kolya's decline, as he wrestles with the bulk of official power, is indeed Biblical in its swiftness, but at least Job wound up with a thousand she-asses. Our hero can hardly keep himself in hooch. "Leviathan" is a tale for vertiginous times, with the ruble in free fall. There must be thousands of stories like Kolya's right now, lives folding and collapsing, upon which Zvyagintsev could cast his unfoolable eye. Despite that, he is not primarily a satirist, or even a social commentator; he is the calm surveyor of a fallen world, and "Leviathan," for all its venom, never writhes out of control. His compositions keep their poise, and the sight of a digger destroying a house, chomping away at furniture and walls, is presented in a long and tranquil take. All ages, and all habitations, are ripe for wrecking; Roma and his mates—Russia's future—hang out in the hull of a ruined church, around a fire. "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward," Job was told, and we watch those same sparks, rising peacefully into the dark. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Frank Cotham, must be received by Sunday, January 4th. The finalists in the December 15th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 19th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"You had me at olé."
Rachel M. Loveman, Indianapolis, Ind.



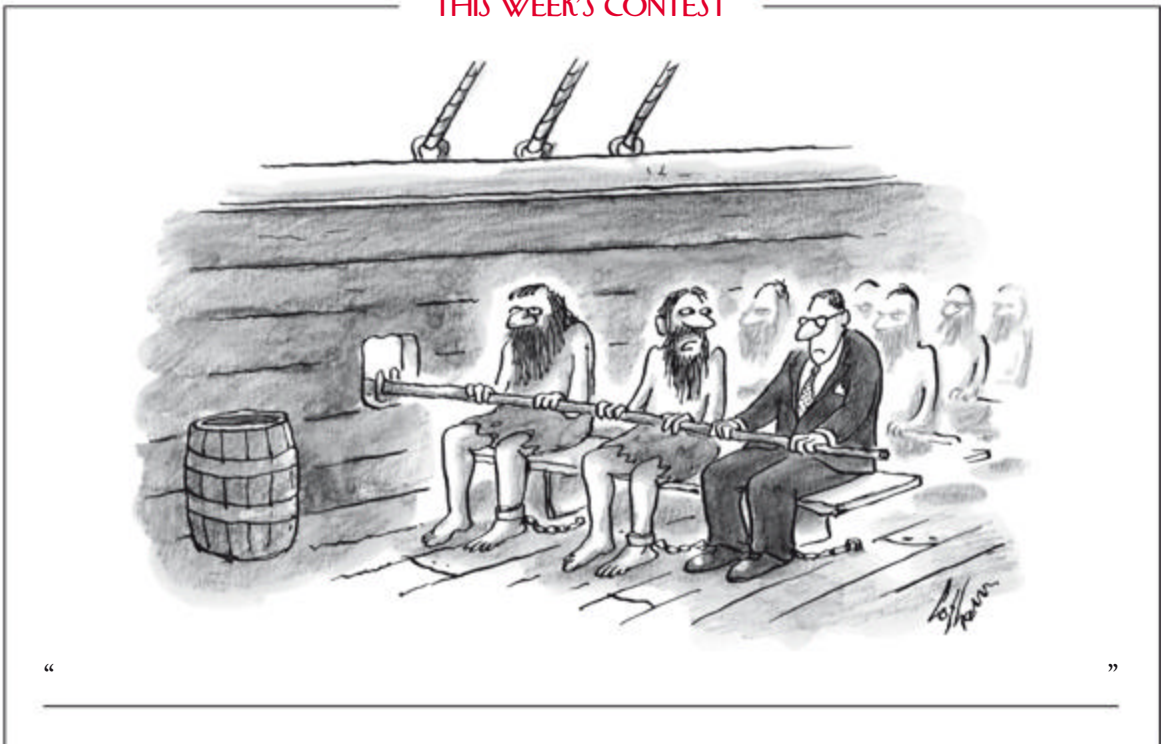
THE FINALISTS

"I'm afraid I can't discuss my other patients."
David Morgan, Sydney, Australia

"Sorry, my time is up."
Shane O'Donohoe, Greystones, Ireland

"I'm sensing some hostility."
Carmen Petaccio, Austin, Texas

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9:49 PM

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